

IKHLAAS

THE OUISOC MAGAZINE

RESILIENCE

REVIEWING RUMOURED
REMEDIES

COPING WITH LOSS

DEEN BEHIND BARS

NEW:
STUDENT RESEARCH
PROJECTS

AND MORE!





إِخْلَاصٌ

Ikhlaas

[Noun] Sincerity





Issue 3

Theme: Resilience



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IN THE NAME OF GOD,
THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL

FROM THE EDITOR

This third issue of the Oxford University Islamic Society Magazine is released in circumstances broadly unchanged from those that accompanied the first and second. The difference is perhaps that the novelty of these conditions has slightly worn off; though doubtless the extent of challenges remains just as significant. Resilience is the theme for this issue, and it's likely resonant of characteristics we've all had to embody over the last couple of months in some way or another.

The magazine content itself will probably speak better than a few sentences here on the nature of some of these challenges faced recently by ISoc members. Though rest assured, there is plenty of light-hearted content throughout too, including a piece on things to do when you're stuck indoors, another on rumoured remedies, and an alumni article which gives insight into the legendary bros' football.

Notably, we've introduced a new section to the Magazine on student research projects, which will hopefully be of interest to those who would like more of an insight into what exactly it is that fellow Oxford students get up to. We're pleased to say also that the Current Affairs section for this edition of the Magazine is packed with six articles, each of which offers a unique response to the stimulus of 'Justice'.

This third issue of the Magazine also marks the final one worked on collectively by me, Basim, Muaz and Abdul Lateef. It has been a rewarding experience putting this issue and the previous ones together and we hope that the Magazine has been of benefit to Oxford's Muslim community, those interested in learning more about this community, and other readers elsewhere.

Inshallah, this year will give us all the resilience to face any challenges that come our way, now or in the future.

Wasalaam,
Noor Qurashi

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THE WARRIOR

SAINT

**A historical tale of resilience, faith
and determination in the life of
Abdel Kader.**

by IMRAN NAVED

Note: Most of this article is based on John Kiser's excellent biography, Commander of the Faithful, with supplementary information from other sources listed in the footnotes and bibliography.

Scholar, mystic, freedom fighter, philosopher-statesman; Emir Abd al-Kader ibn Muhyi al-Din al-Jazairi¹ al-Hasani² is widely regarded as one of the greatest Muslims to have lived and one who truly embodied all the different manifestations of a true Muslim. The hero of Algeria who led the resistance against the colonial forces in the mid-19th century, he was also celebrated by the West for his honour and clemency towards his enemies.

If you happen to travel to Iowa in the US, you may stumble upon a town with the curious name of Elkader. No this is not a mistake; it has indeed been named after this legendary hero. In the coming years, another American would honour Abd al-Kader as a great Muslim and humanitarian: this time it would be Abraham Lincoln.

But why did the West grow to admire and love this Arab Chieftain from North Africa?

Born in 1808 in the remote Ottoman Beylik³ of Oran, in what was then known as the regency of Algiers, his father Muhyi al-Din was a prominent figure of the *Qadiriyya tariqa* (spiritual path). His close relationship with Sufism and the *Qadiriyya* would affect Abd al-Kader for the rest of his life. There is a prophetic tradition that once every hundred years, Allah sends an exemplary – someone who revives the spirit of Islam and counters the laziness and neglect among the

believers⁴. Muhyi al-Din believed that Abd al-Kader may be that man and paid close attention to the latter's early education and spiritual teaching. Abd al-Kader grew up in his father's *zawiya*⁵ and received a thorough education in Theology (*Kalam*), Sufism (*Tasawwuf*), Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), Grammar (*Nabw*), and other sciences – he was a bona-fide scholar! Even at a young age, Abd al-Kader was eager to correct the wrongs that he saw around him. *'The ink of the scholar is worth more than the blood of martyrs'*⁶ and *'To have knowledge and not use it is to be like a donkey laden with books'*⁷ were some of the principles that Abd al-Kader internalised deeply in those early years.

In 1830, Algeria was invaded by France – Abd al-Kader's time had arrived.

For the past 300 years Algeria had been under the influence of the Ottoman Empire.

However, by the 1800s, the glorious days in which the Ottoman empire had sent tremors throughout Europe had long faded away. In Algeria, the Ottoman administration was nothing more than groups of administrators collecting taxes from the various disparate tribes in the region. As the invasion took hold and the French deposed the Ottoman administrators, chaos ensued. By November 1832, the leaders of several tribes asked Muhyi al-Din to officially become their leader and unify their struggle against the invaders. Due to his old age, he relinquished this responsibility in favour of his

son, Abd al-Kader. On November 21, seven of the largest tribes pledged allegiance to the Emir under a large elm tree^{8,9}. Muhyi al-Din proclaimed: *'Here is your Sultan announced by the prophecies!'* Abd al-Kader humbly refused the title of Sultan the tribes had offered him; rather, he preferred to be simply called Emir, or commander. Later, he became known as Emir al-Mu'mineen, or Commander of the Faithful.

For the next twelve years, Abd al-Kader led a resistance against the occupiers; it was in those years that his true quality became apparent. For the Emir, there was no difference between the outward and inward forms of Islam. Outwardly, he was lenient

Despite the severe temperature, when the hour arrived, Abd el-Kader dismounted his horse, made his ablutions with snow, and recited his prayer as if he were in his tent. Very few were those who imitated him.

and humane towards his prisoners. Even in the face of increasingly dire straits, the Emir would refuse to harm his prisoners in any way and would treat them like his own soldiers. In one instance: *"Abd al-Kader has unconditionally returned all our prisoners, without an exchange. He told them: 'I have nothing more with which to feed you, I do not wish to slay you, I will return you'"*¹⁰. Inwardly, he was the strictest among his people in maintaining the ritual prayers and invocations. Léon Roches, who accompanied him, writes "...we were assailed by a snowstorm which fell so heavily that soon the snow on

the ground exceeded thirty centimetres. The cold was unbearable. Despite the severe temperature, when the hour arrived, Abd el-Kader dismounted his horse, made his ablutions with snow, and recited his prayer as if he were in his tent. Very few were those who imitated him¹¹. As the war grew ever more desperate, he only increased his devotion and reliance on God: "The nights are long, O my friends! The One, the Eternal alone knoweth my state".

Within a year of fighting, raids and careful politics, Abd al-Kader succeeded in uniting the tribes and re-establishing some form of security in the region. This process was not easy, and he encountered numerous setbacks early on, perhaps the gravest being when General Clauzel of France set forth on November 1835 and marched to the Emir's capital of Maracha. The Emir's forces were ill-disciplined and routed on the battlefield - Maracha was now occupied by enemy troops. At this moment, when the Emir witnessed his forces abandoning him at the first sign of defeat, doubts began to emerge about his divine mission. How could he possibly unify his people when they acted like this? It was at this point that his people came back to him; they kissed his hands and reminded him that he was their leader appointed by God to direct this struggle. Abd el-Kader would not abandon his promise to God, and it was this solemn vow that

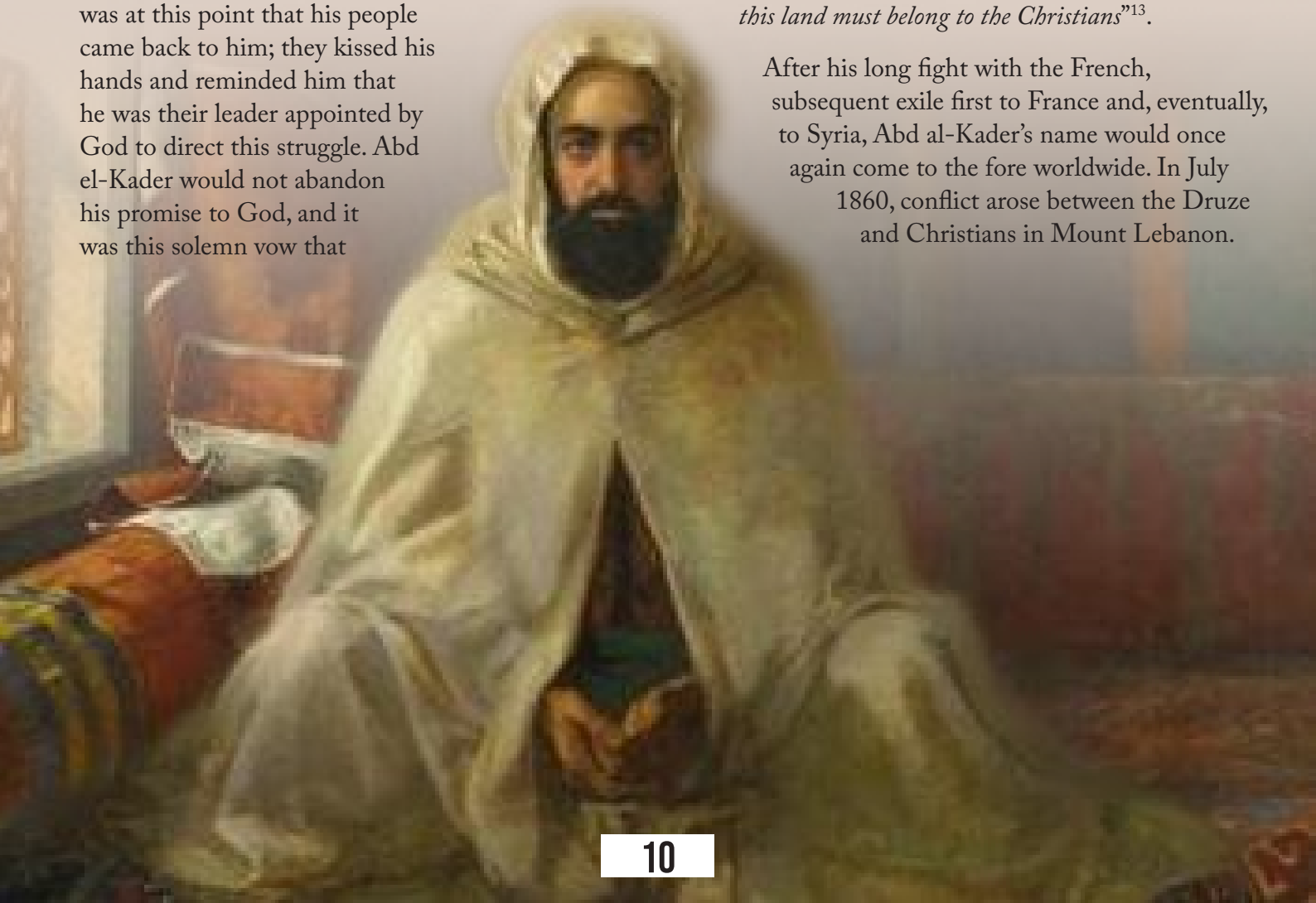
'...I praised you as God Most High will praise you on the day when 'neither their wealth nor their children avail'. In reality, you have put into practise the words of the great apostle of God Most High, bearing witness to compassion for His humble creatures, and you have set up a barrier against those who reject his great example...'

Imam Shamil of Dagestan in his letters to Abd al-Kader following the riots¹⁶

would sustain him for coming years of hardship.

Eventually, the French were forced to regroup, at one point committing almost a third of the French army to quell the "Algerian rebellion" and capture the Emir. Employing scorched earth tactics, the French ensured that, one-by-one, the tribes abandoned him until, in December 1847, he surrendered to General Lamoricière. According to his biographer Charles Churchill,¹² before surrendering, he gathered his remaining warriors and announced: "*Believe me, the fight is over. Let us resign ourselves. God is witness that we have fought as long as we have been able to. If He has not given us the victory, it is because he has judged that this land must belong to the Christians*"¹³.

After his long fight with the French, subsequent exile first to France and, eventually, to Syria, Abd al-Kader's name would once again come to the fore worldwide. In July 1860, conflict arose between the Druze and Christians in Mount Lebanon.





“The generous concern, the tender sympathy” he showed to his prisoners-of-war was “almost without parallel in the annals of war”.

This conflict eventually spread to Damascus where Emir Abd al-Kader was residing and local Druze and Muslims in Damascus attacked the Christian quarter, killing over three thousand people. When the violence broke out, the Emir personally set out and sheltered large numbers of Christians, including prominent delegates in his house. Churchill writes, ‘He patrolled the burning streets. His men went from house to house, entering and crying out: ‘Christians! Come out! Do not fear us, we are the men of Abd el-Kader who have come here to save you! Come out, come out!’¹⁴. For this great act, he was lionised by the Western press. The French honoured him with the Legion of Honour, their highest recognition of valour, and to this day he is the sole Muslim distinguished by the Pope who presented him with the order of Pius IX.

Emir Abd al-Kader’s life was the life of a true warrior saint. Extolled by the West and eulogised

by the East, his bravery, dedication, and resilience earned him flocks of admirers from amongst his people and on the battlefield. What stood out was his high moral character, his piety, and truthfulness, all of which made him beloved to even his enemies. As Charles Churchill says, “*The generous concern, the tender sympathy*” he showed to his prisoners-of-war was “*almost without parallel in the annals of war*”. In 1843, Jean-de-Dieu Soult declared that he was one of the three great men then living; the other two being Imam Shamil of Dagestan and Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt.¹⁵

Bibliography

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Emir Abd el-Kader: Hero and Saint of Islam, Ahmed Bouyerdene
The Compassionate Warrior: Abd El-Kader of Algeria, Elsa Marston

FOOTNOTES

1 Al-Jazairi literally means ‘The Algerian’.
2 A descendant of the Prophet (PBUH) through his grandson Hasan.
3 Name for a principality or a small kingdom. Literally means under the jurisdiction of a Bey who is an Ottoman governor.
4 Narrated by Abu Huraira that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: ‘Allah will raise for this community at the end of every 100 years the one who will renovate its religion for it.’ – Sunan Abi Dawud.
5 The zawiya is a kind of Islamic religious school generally associated with one of the Sufi orders.
6 Attributed to a weak hadith.
7 Reference to Q62:5
8 Some say it was an Ash tree
9 God and the Perfect Man in the Experience of ‘Abd al-Qâdir al-Jaza’iri, Itzchak Weismann, ibnarabisociety.org/abd-al-qadir-al-jazairi-god-and-the-

perfect-man-itzchak-weismann/
10 Letter dated February 14, 1842, in *Lettres du marechal Saint-Arnaud*, vol. 1, p. 386.
11 Cited in S. Aouli, R. Redjala, and P. Zoummeroff, *Abd el-Kader*, p. 478.
12 Charles Henry Churchill met Abd al-Kader for an hour each day for several months between 1859-1860 when he was in exile in Damascus. Interestingly, he is (as hinted by the surname) a distant cousin of Winston Churchill – the world is very small indeed!
13 Charles H. Churchill. ‘La Via de Abd el Kader’ p271
14 Charles H. Churchill. ‘La Via de Abd el Kader’ p313
15 Alexandre Bellemare, *Abd-el-Kader sa vie politique et militaire*, Hachette, 1863, p.4
16 Taken from rumisgarden.co.uk/blogs/traditional-meditations/letter-from-imam-shamil-to-emir-abd-al-qadir-al-jazairi-and-the-amirs-response-1

STUDENT BLOG

In this issue we will be hearing from Hira, Rashma and Imaad as they each outline the significance of Resilience to their Oxford journey so far.



For me, getting to Oxford was not an easy or linear journey. But when I look back, I realise that all the setbacks and failures happened at exactly the right time to direct me to where I am today.

Self-belief in the face of failure:

The journey started 11 years ago when my Grade 9 result was much lower than expected. In a fit of anger, 14 year-old Hira said “Forget it, I’m not doing the Pakistani system anymore. I know I’m better than this, all they test is rote learning.”

Planning your next course of action:

I did not let this experience discourage me, God guided me and I quickly decided to jump straight to A Levels once I finished Grade 10.

Not being afraid of challenges:

This wasn’t easy; no school would admit me because they thought I’d fail miserably at A Level without having done GCSE. One school finally agreed to “see how it goes” - and boy was it challenging!

Celebrating your achievements:

I worked incredibly hard those 2 years and with the help of God, got 3 A* and 5 distinctions, two of which were ‘Highest marks in the world in As and A Level Physics’. Alhamdulillah.

Being strong-willed about your goals:

I knew I wanted to apply abroad and do research, but this path was very unfamiliar and uncertain and I had no one to guide me during the process. Finally, I got a scholarship to study biomedical sciences at QMUL in London. I then applied to Oxbridge for a Masters and got in both places - but because I am not a UK/EU citizen, there was no scholarship for my degree and the fees were 8 times as high. So I had to turn down the offers which was a major disappointment.

Persistence:

It felt very unfair and discriminatory. But God had a plan: I got a scholarship at UCL which introduced me

to cancer epigenetics and skills I wouldn’t have learnt with the masters at Oxbridge! And next year I decided to apply again to Oxbridge for my PhD.

Not giving up:

I got accepted at Oxford but again couldn’t get departmental funding due to me being an international student! Understandably I was very upset, but God had planned that I would develop a project with my supervisor and learn to apply for external funding. On the 1st of Ramadan 2018, I unexpectedly heard from Oxford – someone had dropped out and I was the next person on the list to be given the Clarendon scholarship! And the exciting project we had developed during the waiting period became my main project.

Whenever I now face setbacks, I remind myself of God’s amazing plan throughout this time. I would never have done A Levels and applied to the UK if I hadn’t gotten those horrible marks 11 years ago. I would have never found my current supervisor nor learnt to do bioinformatics if I hadn’t done the UCL Masters. I would not have developed the project I am doing now if I had gotten funding straight away.

As long as we exercise resilience and trust God – we will get to wherever we need to be, at exactly the precise time.

“And whoever is mindful of God, He will make for him a way out. And provide for him from sources he could never imagine! And whoever puts his trust in God, then God is sufficient for him. Verily, God will accomplish his purpose. God has already destined a due measure for everything.”
[Holy Quran, 65: 2-3]

*Hira Javaid,
DPhil Oncology,
St. John’s College*



Disclaimer: Young Muslim women are not a homogenous group. Whilst my story may be all too familiar, it by no means represents the journey of every young Muslim woman leaving her home for university.

An 18-year-old, I accepted my first case – can Rashma Rahman move out to university? The plaintiff: my parents, the defendant: myself. As an aspiring barrister, if I could not win this case for myself, how could I stand in front of a judge and successfully fight someone else's? Resilience would be my armour and weapon in this unexpected battle with my parents.

I couldn't accuse them of gender bias, since my brothers studied for their degrees living at home too. As the fifth of six children, daring to want to move out before marriage, I was in line for a tough face-off. The decision was difficult for my parents, whose fears were all about my welfare. But I needed them to trust not simply me but their own parenting – to believe in themselves enough to see in front of them a woman they raised, who could be trusted to live independently – and I needed to bring them with me on this journey of self-discovery.

Resilience occurs in the face of adversity and we glorify it with the highs of overcoming challenges, but often mistakenly obscure the reality of the pain that comes with it. My parents' worst fear was ultimately that sending me off to a white, male-dominated, and elitist institution would strip me of my religious values and distance me from Allah SWT. Little did they know that I would learn more about Islam here than in the Muslim community where I was raised. Why? Partly it's the direct access to Muslim scholars, but the most important thing has been belonging to the ISoc community. I pride myself on my identity: wearing

my salwar kameez, sharing the bond of sisterhood, and giving back to my communities the best I can. That sense of identity has been sharpened and not diluted by encountering such different worlds, worlds of privilege whose children navigate lectures and medieval dining halls as if it were all built for them – because, in a sense, it was. Entering this space as an outsider is a profound education. We are all too comfortable with the idea that young Muslim women are seasoned to these types of challenges, and we ask too rarely how the world could look different so that living in it might be easier.

Moving out to Oxford has been the greatest opportunity and test of my faith yet. Sometimes I fail and sometimes I flourish, but our deen encourages me to strive for ihsaan (excellence), not perfection. I learnt that it's not just about overcoming hardship but the attitude you have towards the challenge. This battle has been life changing for me. It gave a sense of purpose, initially to my university experience and now to my life. My career aspirations have changed, as I gained a new sense of confidence not in winning cases, but in encouraging others. I want to head back to the classroom after graduation to make education more accessible, academically and institutionally.

As my Nana (maternal granddad) wisely said on my first day at Oxford, "Stay strong. Be strong." There are many challenges ahead, but I must hold onto the resilience I've demonstrated before, stay grounded in my faith, and make du'a that Allah SWT will guide me towards that which is best for me.

*Rashma Rahman,
3rd Year History,
Pembroke College*

Michaelmas of my first year hit a lot harder than expected; the academic shift created a constant questioning of my ability throughout that term. In the vacation, this anxiety climaxed as I saw my first collection as the true test. There are definitely brothers and sisters who had a similar experience or are currently going through the same thing. However, having come out the other side, all I can say is Alhamdulillah for that period of my life. At times of academic stress, my prayers and duas increased, but after that I returned to being a certified wasteman. That test, along with being in the company of righteous brothers, was perhaps the turning point for my Islamic development and where I began to understand the importance of Tawakkul, reliance upon Allah (SWT).

From Hilary onwards, the blessing that is our Deen became more of a priority, and Alhamdulillah I've become comfortable with Oxford; something I never thought I would say. Allah (SWT) says in the Qur'an "Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear..." – 2:286 and only now have I begun to appreciate the wisdom of this verse. These last few months have been a particularly testing time for the ummah and the world, as people have been tested in numerous ways. For instance, brothers close to me have experienced an extremely difficult few months in their lives, losing loved ones in the middle of a busy exam schedule, along with the issues of isolation. Subhaan'Allah, they were all able to realise the blessings within these trials, when others may have not. In all honesty, only now upon seeing how those brothers remained steadfast in their Imaan, have I been able to see my test as Allah (SWT) showing his love and mercy, guiding me through. A beautiful hadith from our beloved Prophet (SAWS) that

provides a powerful reminder for brothers and sisters going through difficulties was reported by Abu Hurayra (RA), "If Allah wills good for someone, He afflicts him with trials" – Sahih al-Bukhari.

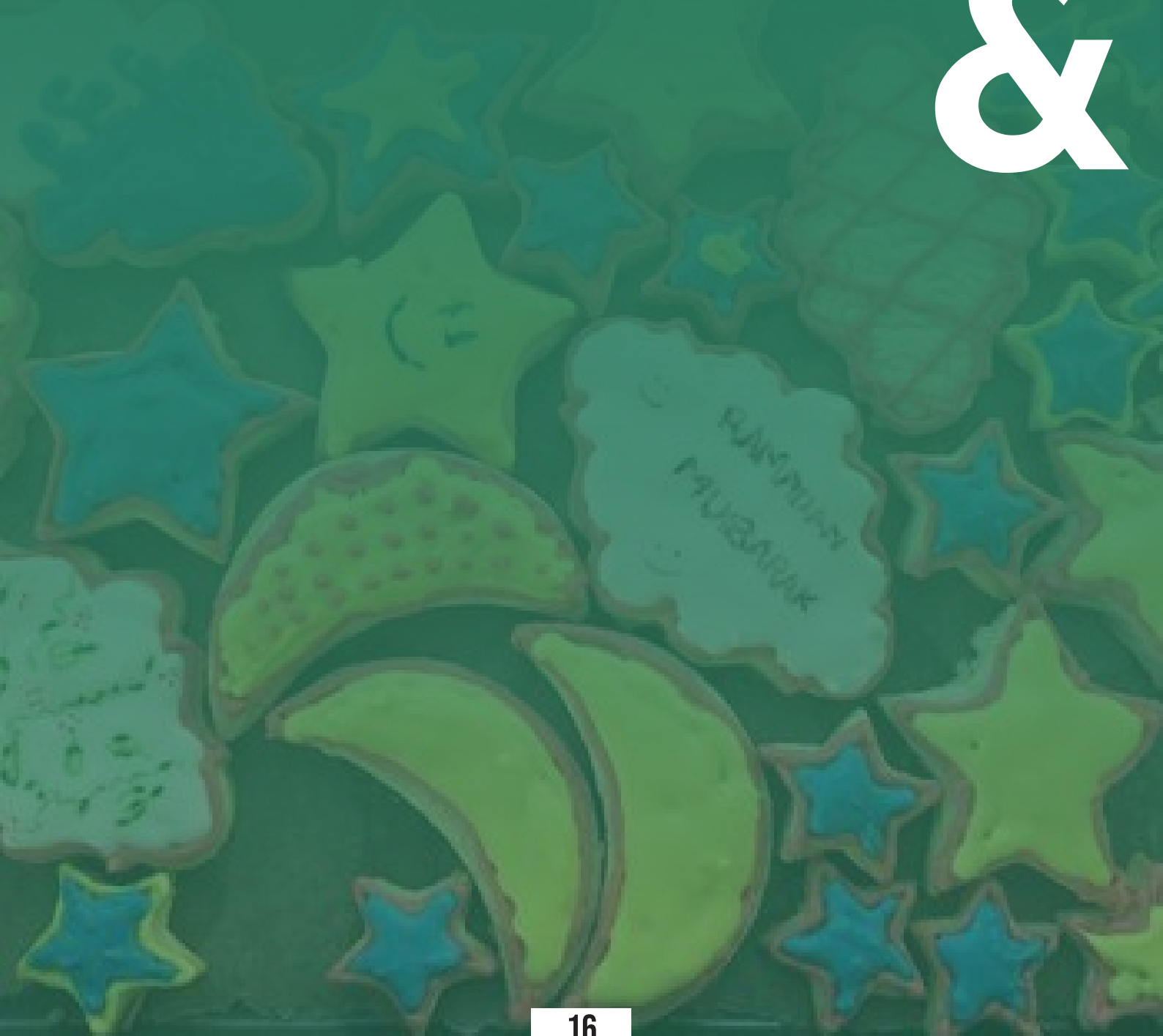
Along with increasing your acts of worship and duas, I strongly urge the brothers and sisters to make use of the community that we are fortunate to have here in Oxford. Support and guidance will always be available for all brothers and sisters, regardless of the situation.

Subhaan'Allah, weeks after I wrote this blog, my mother passed away and many members of my family caught severe cases of COVID, including my father. Allah (SWT) has a plan in place for us all. Writing about this beforehand prepared me for what was planned for me. Perhaps a better example of trusting in Allah's plan is that I had no real desire to go to Oxford to begin with. My decision to attend Oxford derived from Salatul Istakhara. Even throughout my first term, I was unaware of the reason as to why Allah (SWT) had guided me this way, but I accepted it. Having spent a year and term in Oxford, my reliance on Allah (SWT) has grown significantly, mostly due to the guidance given from the brothers around me and this has prepared me for the most difficult time of my life. Subhaan'Allah, that's beautiful to me. May Allah (SWT) support us all through the struggles that we go through not only at university, but throughout life. Ameen.

*Imaad Ahmed,
2nd Year
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Welfare &





Lifestyle

In this issue's Welfare and Lifestyle section, we include four articles, all relevant to the theme of Resilience. In *Reviewing Rumoured Remedies*, we've pretty much got you covered for those nagging questions that everyone always has but for which no one really knows who to ask. We've also got an article on things to do when you're stuck indoors, and a piece that discusses the work of the Oxford Homeless Project - particularly apt to the theme of Resilience given the times we're in. In addition to this, Abdul Lateef offers methods of coping with loss, through drawing on his own experience. We hope that you enjoy the range of content included in this issue.

Interesting Isolation Ideas

For many of us, the worst part of Michaelmas term was a certain dreaded phone call that we had hoped to never receive: “hello, your housemate’s covid and you must now self-isolate for 14 days” – or at least, words to that effect. Hours spent indoors can be intellectually enriching at the best of times, and boring at the worst. Five ISoc members, all of them having been in self-isolation at some point during Michaelmas term, give their top tips on things to do when stuck inside. Yousef gives one point because he was in self-isolation for one day, which doesn’t really make sense if you think about it but we’ll go with that.

Ibraheem Mirza

1 Play Minecraft: You feel secluded from the reality of the outside world, so why not bring the outside world to you? With Minecraft, you can create your own reality, design your dream house without the constraints of money, and defeat the horrible mobs, who you can easily represent as all the things you hate about the lockdown. This game develops the creative spirit and will allow you to connect with fellow ISoc gamers from other colleges/unis; probably the only form of socialisation you will be able to do during Hilary term, by the looks of things.

2 Origami with your assignments: Now assignments during self-isolation can be a pain. However, let the inner peace develop inside you by learning how to do origami. Expand from the paper aeroplane and learn to craft many different creatures: frogs, cats, horses as well as objects like tables, chairs, trees. All these things can be made from simply folding your assignment worksheets; for let us face it, that is probably a better use of these papers than just completing them.

Ameerah Latif

3 Read: If, like me, you have a shamefully high to be read pile, isolation is the perfect opportunity to make a dent in it. The best part about reading is that fiction is an easy, corona-friendly escape from your four walls and as a bonus you get to show off how well read you are when you’re done. Everyone who knows me knows that I am always, always, going on about Jane Austen but she really is the perfect companion for isolation (I recommend pride and prejudice first)! If you want something a little more dramatic try *The Great Gatsby*, for a little more action give Agatha Christie a shot and for something a bit more sci-fi *Never Let Me Go* is perfect.

4 Keep in contact: The best thing to do during isolation is guilt trip your friends into ‘visiting’ outside your window, hopefully while en route to deliver you groceries and snacks. It might feel a bit like you’re playing at Rapunzel (Rapunzel, Rapunzel let down your...hijab?) but by about day four even the strongest introverts amongst us will be missing human contact. It’s a bizarre but funny experience; every time I got a visitor during isolation it made my day. And even though they may be a storey or so below you can have a proper conversation, just don’t complain about college too much - you’re well within earshot.





Aneela Shah

5 Open a window: It sounds simple, but if you enjoy being outside like I do, or are used to it, staying inside for a consecutive number of days can be unbearable. To overcome this, open a window! You will be surprised at how letting air and natural light into the room can dramatically make or break the vibe of your room, especially if you are there for a week. As the days get colder, if opening a window isn't an option, even positioning yourself in front of a window whilst working can make a massive difference!

6 Make a meal plan: This is more of a practical suggestion of something to do when in self-isolation, but what I found very useful was making a meal plan for the week. If you have access to a kitchen, brainstorm what dishes you plan on making. Including a list of ingredients is also useful, as this will come in handy when asking your college welfare team, or a friend to buy groceries for you, as it will ensure you have all the things you need when the time comes to cook!

Anonymous Brother

7 Exercise: Just like you're stuck in your room with no way out, all those excess calories from your depressed binge-eating will likely be stuck with you for some time. Whilst ordering in your favourite snacks is important to your happiness, doing some exercise might do wonders for you too (and your body will thank you later). Personally, I found HIIT/Tabata workouts easy to fit into my schedule. Find a timer online, and do simple bodyweight exercises in short bursts – a 20 minute set could probably leave you fulfilled (read: sore) for a couple of days. If you're adventurous, why not break some personal records? I know of people who've even attempted a half-marathon (4000 laps of their room)!

8 Learn a useless skill: Beyond meaningful self-improvement (learning to cook, memorizing the Quran, or any of the other suggestions on this list), there are lots of things you can learn to do that are enjoyable but also useless 99.9% of the time. Wikipedia-surf and become an expert on commuter train stock. Learn to beatbox (hope your housemates don't complain of the elephant noises coming from your room when you attempt to trumpet). Become an avid fan of marble racing on YouTube (strangely addictive). You know what they say – knowledge is power, and this is power few others wield.

Yousef Elkerm

9 Food and cooking are subjects that have always intrigued me though I have only explored them in a casual capacity. Cooking is somewhat of a science, as well as a cultural artefact, involving elements of chemistry and physics. A simple example of this is traditional Neapolitan-style pizza which gets its characteristic texture as a result of wood-fired brick ovens. The fire inside the oven heats the bricks of the oven's dome and floor, and once those materials have absorbed all the heat they can, it begins radiating inside the oven. And that is what actually cooks the pizza - not the hot air in the oven or the heat directly from the fire itself. Because the radiated electromagnetic waves are coming from so many different angles of the dome walls and floor of the oven, hot spots can exist on the oven's cooking surface. This also explains why cooking is not affected in wood-fired ovens when fresh, room temperature air enters the oven - passing over the pizza - to feed the fire at the back. These phenomena intrigue me all the more upon realising that for most of human history we have made massive culinary progress without knowing the science behind what we're doing. Because of the interesting processes behind cooking, and the rich history and culture surrounding certain foods, there is something enjoyable for everyone when it comes to cooking. Dedicating yourself some time to cook, be it one meal a day or a week, can be quite therapeutic and rewarding.

REVIEWING RUMOURED REMEDIES

Over the past year, it's fair to say that our lives have changed dramatically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We've had to rethink the way we go about practically everything, always knowing in the back of our mind that anything we do in person runs the risk of contracting the virus and the dreaded 14 days of self-isolation. One of the things that probably hasn't changed too much for many of us is the prevalence of conspiracy theories and rumoured remedies for disease, some of which are certainly a bit far-fetched. This made me think about how we approach home medicine more generally and the perhaps less than 'scientific' methods we employ, from holding our breath to stop hiccups to using lemon and honey to cure colds.

CARROTS

I'm sure we all heard growing up that carrots improve our eyesight, perhaps as a vain attempt to make us eat vegetables. But is there a basis behind this? Well, if it was strictly true then everybody would eat tonnes of carrots and glasses would be unnecessary. The main nutritional contribution of carrots is beta carotene, which the body can convert to vitamin A, and is needed to produce rhodopsin, a pigment required to detect light. This particular pigment is found on the rod cells of the retina - the cells used to process low levels of light. Once photons of light hit this pigment it triggers the initiation of electrical impulse to the brain to interpret the light and help us see, particularly in the dark. That's why a vitamin A deficiency can lead to a condition known as night blindness, whereby you can see entirely normally during the day but struggle to see at night or in dim lighting conditions. During the Second World War, being able to see in the dark was necessary even for the general population, at the time of the Blitz for example, so there was a campaign to encourage people to eat more carrots to improve their vision, and the idea has stuck around since then. Carrots won't stop you from needing glasses (rather unfortunately) but they will enable you to see a bit better in the dark. So don't go binge eating carrots in the hope of having the world's best eyesight, but keep a good amount of vitamin A in your diet so you can see properly in the dark, even if it's not necessarily from carrots.

HONEY

Honey is a remedy that is probably familiar to us all given its importance in prophetic medicine. The Prophet SAW said "Honey is a remedy for every illness and the Quran is a remedy for all illness of the mind, therefore I recommend to you both remedies, the Quran and honey." How exactly does it work? Does it help get rid of a cold? Well, essentially it aids in reducing congestion, which helps you feel a bit better, and it contains a significant amount of vitamin C, which is known to boost the immune system. It has many functions in the immune system, including promoting proliferation of immune cells, so there are more T cells to help remove cold causing viruses (usually rhinoviruses, though over 200 strains of viruses are implicated in causing colds). So basically, honey can indirectly help cure a cold, but the immune system has the main role in getting rid of it; using this remedy probably speeds up the cure, but nothing too bad would happen without it.

5 SECOND RULE

For some people enough time for a whole load of germs to get all over your food, for others the maximum amount of time for which food can be on the floor before you pick it up and eat it. Is the 5 second rule something you should follow? Whilst studies do show a lot of bacteria can get onto your food if you leave it on the floor for too long, it is in fact encouraged to eat food you've dropped on the floor - reported from Jaabir: I heard the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, saying, "The devil is present with each of you in everything he does; he is present when you are eating; so if any one of you drops food he should remove any dirt on it and eat it and not leave it for the devil; and when he finishes eating he should lick his fingers, for he does not know in which portion of his food the blessing lies" [Muslim]. Though I should add that I certainly wouldn't recommend waiting out the full 5 seconds before doing it - pick up the food as quickly as possible, and make sure it's clean before you eat it.

HOLDING YOUR BREATH

Holding your breath to stop hiccups is another trick we often try, but what's the scientific idea behind it? First, we have to understand what a hiccup is - involuntary contractions of the diaphragm terminated by abrupt closure of the glottis (a flap of cartilage at the top of your throat). Now, holding your breath (or breathing into a paper bag) can produce a mild respiratory acidosis - your blood pH gets a bit lower, which can then directly inhibit contraction of the diaphragm. This means that you can stop the abnormal breathing movements that would normally result in hiccups. Therefore holding your breath does work for most cases of hiccups. However, it's probably not just nerves that control breathing which cause hiccups; in many cases there's something going on in the brain as well - my old French teacher always used to ask us what we'd eaten for dinner the night before so we'd forget about the hiccups, and it almost always stopped them.

GINGER

Ginger has been used for centuries to treat stomach aches, vomiting and nausea. Some research does suggest that it is fairly good at treating nausea and vomiting. It is believed to achieve this by acting on the stomach and intestines to increase their motility (the rate at which their contents are emptied), which is often associated with vomiting, nausea and stomach aches. Though the exact mechanism by which this is achieved is not fully understood, it is fairly clear that ginger does have some pretty powerful pharmacological properties and research continues though is hindered by inconsistency in using the same form of ginger (powdered, dried, fresh, preserved, pickled, candied and the list goes on). However, it seems (unlike in some of the above cases) that the answer is fairly clear cut - ginger does help relieve stomach aches, vomiting and nausea.

There are lots of different remedies we try at home to cure simple illnesses. Some of these ideas have a pretty shaky scientific basis, so should probably be avoided, for others the evidence we have is inconclusive, though these remedies don't necessarily appear to be harmful. Others, like ginger, have a fairly solid scientific foundation and should be used with confidence. In any case, carefully consider your home remedies.

Bilal Qureshi

COPING WITH LOSS

Be sure We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere

[Surah Al-Baqarah – 2:155]

As Muslims, we know better than anyone that tests are certain in this life, but that the hereafter exists as well and loss in this world is only fleeting. Unfortunately, such knowledge does not make loss any less painful. It is narrated in the Hadith (Sahih al-Bukhari 1241) that the Prophet himself wept when his son passed away.

The reflections below are gleaned from my own experience – of suddenly losing one of my best friends a few years ago – and that of my friends who shared this loss with me. Everyone responds to loss differently, and this is completely normal; the experiences I share here are by no means meant to invalidate yours.

Accepting Loss

This is often the most painful part of the entire journey, but it gets better. Any number of emotions may overcome you – anger, guilt, frustration, sadness. You might also feel completely numb to what has happened, as a form of denial. For me, I remember the pain was a paradox: a sort of emptiness in, and huge weight on, my heart at the same time. The worst part is that you might be confused as to whom or where you should direct these emotions. You might blame yourself for failing to do more. You might

blame doctors, the deceased, or any number of related people. Part of you may even direct frustration towards Allah swt, for what you perceive as injustice. But there is no room for despair in the heart of a believer, and this pain too shall pass.

Focus elsewhere

Life goes on. Taking time to grieve is alright, but there must come a point of accepting that you owe duties to yourself and also to those around you. Make a list. Start with small things, like ensuring you eat all your meals, that you complete your prayers, that you take a walk outside. Getting busy helps distract from your sorrows and will return a sense of normalcy to your life. This is not easy but try to beat your urge to lie in bed, staring at the ceiling for hours on end. “Fake it till you make it” has far more truth than you might believe.

Find activities that allow you to expend your energy. I found that taking long runs helped me exhaust myself, so I slept better. This was better than staying awake all night alone with my thoughts. Getting outdoors also helped; the fresh air, the cool wind and being closer to nature was therapeutic. But nature alone is insufficient as a healer.

Speak to people

Humans are social creatures; we require the warmth of others in our lives. When feeling low, we sometimes have the tendency to put walls up around us and keep to ourselves. This might come from a position of care, that you do not want to ‘burden’ those around you with your sorrows. However, the truth is that your friends and family are usually concerned for you. Opening up to people you trust is a cathartic



How to help as a friend

As a friend, do not underestimate the support you can provide beyond making du'a. Sometimes, a physical presence makes all the difference. It is a difficult position to be in, balancing the concern you want to show your friend and not being overbearing. Try these things out:

First, be an active listener. Let your friend rant and grieve, even if they seemingly go in circles. It might be that nothing makes sense in their head - remind them that they are not walking that journey of figuring things out completely alone.

Second, do not trivialize their suffering or response. People respond to loss in completely different ways, and that is alright! Rather, validate their concerns and worries where possible. Engage them in conversation and encourage that they continue edging along that road to recovery.

Third, give them space. This journey is one that each person must take themselves. As friends, we might feel helpless seeing someone we care deeply about stuck in such a place but remember that they are far more frustrated with themselves. Be there when they need you, but if they ask for solitude, allow it. By being too overbearing, you run the risk of making them withdraw further.

Finally, forgive them. From positions of pain, human beings are even more irrational than usual. Some might speak or act in ways they would never otherwise, and you might end up as collateral in their battle. By recognising this, you offer your friend a safe space to heal instead of forcing them to guard words while they struggle to make sense of their loss.

process, though getting there is difficult.

Also remember that you are never truly alone, for He is always with you. Speak to God, whether verbally or in your heart.

Prayer

So, verily, with every difficulty, there is relief. Verily, with every difficulty there is relief.

[Surah Inshirah – 94:5-94:6]

I have personally found these verses among the most powerful in the Quran, and they have given me hope when all else was bleak. God promised the Prophet not once but twice, that for every difficulty and hardship he faced, ease would surely follow.

Most importantly, do not despair. The Qur'an and the Seerah are filled with stories of prophets going through incredible hardship. Nabi Yusuf (as) was kidnapped, became a slave, and was thrown into prison unfairly. Nabi Ayub (as) was inflicted with horrible disease. Nabi Muhammad (saw) was ridiculed and attacked countless times, as were his companions. These people are amongst the most pious and beloved in God's eyes, yet they too were tested in ways we might not imagine.


Instead, try and use that solitude you feel as a chance to reconnect with your Creator. Make dua'. Speak to Him. He knows what is in your heart and understands you far better than any human ever could. Trust that He knows what is best for you, even if you might not know it yourself.

Trust also means that you should not need to feel disappointed or angry with yourself if you are struggling to find closure. These things take time. Inshallah, it will come naturally to you eventually.

The pain and loss might never truly go away. There will always be those nights where you feel your loss greatly. Where you yearn for their company; where you reminisce the good times you had together. Use that time to pray for their soul, to seek forgiveness and God's mercy for them. Eventually that pain will be infused with a bittersweet happiness and gratitude for having once had the pleasure of their company, and you will appreciate the good times you spent together. These are the nights you pray that, one day, you will be reunited with your loved ones in the hereafter.

May God ease your pain and grant you peace!

Abdul Lateef



Through the pandemic with the Oxford Homeless Project

Overlapping voices, cool February sunshine and the warmth of home-cooked food; walking into Feeding the Homeless for the first time, I remember the feeling of unanchored familiarity. Not that I recognised many people, or even the place - in fact, I was relieved to have found the Asian Cultural Centre at all, hidden as it is at the bottom of Manzil Way, unlogged by the supposedly all-seeing eyes of Google Maps. But the friendly bustle of the community felt unmistakably and comfortably normal.

Since Shabnam Sabir set up the project five years ago, it's brought together Oxford's students, residents and those seeking aid, providing a space where each individual is respected no matter their circumstances. Afternoons with the Oxford Homeless Project and other ISoc volunteers were something I came to really look forward to; both making an impact and finding a way to ground yourself in helping out someone else, even just by listening to them

tell you about their day. We'd serve meals, help pack up food for others to take away or simply sit down to enjoy some good company. At that point, the year still promised celebration meals like the Grand Iftar, because the organisation's work goes beyond providing immediate support but also aims to bring about a sense of togetherness. But of course, a lot has changed since then, and their efforts have had to really shift gears during the pandemic. That sense of community spirit is still going strong however, as is the ethos of collaboration without judgement, despite volunteers and customers coming from so many different walks of life. Under new restrictions imposed by Covid-19, the project continues to assist the community despite the difficulties that arose with or were exacerbated by the pandemic.

For safety's sake, the meals for the community had to come to a halt, and they remain suspended for the time being. But that isn't to say the team's hard graft has stopped; instead, it's moved towards



ensuring those in need have access to food and support they require on an individual basis, and ensuring that vulnerable people don't slip through the cracks. The help they provide has been extended toward the wider community too; where the homeless community have had at least some provision from the council in the form of accommodation and meals, a lot of families and elderly residents around Oxford have suddenly found themselves struggling. Reaching out a helping hand in simple ways like doing their customers' grocery shops has been one way they've made sure people are still getting the help they need. Their proactive contact with individuals has become key to maintaining the sense of solidarity that characterises their services over the last year, connecting people who otherwise (and at this time of isolation especially) might never have crossed paths. Shabnam writes: 'The desire to help strangers has been really overwhelming.'

From bringing the number of volunteers down to a minimum to maintain social distancing when delivering hot meals, to treating their regular customers to a Grand Iftar delivered directly to them, their work has both provided vital resources and lifted morale - it's all been massively appreciated.

Christmas came and went in a quieter fashion than normal, but things didn't slow down at the project. For a holiday period where many were unable to see loved ones, we instead saw many devoting time to others: 'Many people have helped us with our hamper project - we decided that because we couldn't organize a Christmas meal this year, we would organize one hundred hampers to be delivered to our regulars and the wider people in need. Lots of people donated and supported us in making over 115 hampers.' If anything, that willingness of so many to donate, package up and deliver hampers to reach out to those whose Christmas plans had been suddenly deflated is the kind of gesture to break the deafening silence of widespread loneliness.

And we'd find plenty of examples of resilience in those providing others the boost to keep pushing

through these difficult few months. 'Communities supporting each other have been great. Knowing that everyone is suffering - even those who probably have not seen struggles have experienced what it's like to struggle - and knowing in these times everyone needs a helping hand or emotional support' writes Shabnam.

“ The desire to help strangers has been really overwhelming.”

'Being at home, many people have had time to reflect and appreciate what's important. And being in this together has played a powerful role in supporting each other. People have stepped up even more

learning how fortunate some of us are in that we have jobs and we have homes, whereas more and more people have lost these in the last few months.'

It's a crucial reminder, even as so many of us have found ourselves away from Oxford and missing that comfortable normality of last Hilary. At this point in the lifetime of the pandemic, we've navigated the yo-yoing of lockdowns, been pulled in and out of tiers and hauled round enough U-turns to give the most steady of us motion-sickness. But as the country resigns itself to another stint of life at home, it's uplifting to see the persevering effort to help those whose homes have been thrown into deep water. Just like the last two lockdowns, this time too will inevitably see vulnerable demographics suffer if they're left without support. But as the OHP looks to set up new initiatives to support these groups, such as a potential community larder in East Oxford, they aim to provide for vulnerable individuals while maintaining that sense of solidarity. Their work continues to play a vital role in helping Oxford's community ride out the third wave.

Closing note:

If you'd like to support the work of the Oxford Homeless Project, you can follow their Facebook page or join their Facebook group for volunteers.

Tayiba Sulaiman

A photograph of a man with a beard, wearing a white thobe and a yellow and white kumma (headpiece). He is looking down at a document he is holding in his hands. The background is a dark, ornate wooden wall with intricate carvings.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Telling Stories

Founded in 1997, Khayaal is the first English language multi award-winning professional Muslim theatre company dedicated to the dramatic interpretation of Muslim and interfaith literature and the experience of Muslims in the modern world for the stage, film, radio, publishing and education. For 23 years, we have served cross-cultural audiences numbering in the hundreds of thousands, both nationally and internationally.

While 2020 may have brought new challenges with the spread of a pandemic and an international lockdown, Luqman Ali and Eleanor Martin, the founders of Khayaal Theatre, are accustomed to being resilient under pressure. Khayaal Theatre is approaching its twenty-fifth year, and its very foundations have been established upon a philosophy and practice of resilience in the face of many economic and socio-cultural challenges. Reaching within in order to mine the wells of resilience and adapt swiftly and gracefully to a rapidly changing situation is only another step that Luqman and Eleanor have taken along a road that demanded resilience from its beginning.

Khayaal Theatre's objectives have been to revitalise a dream virtue and valorise transformative self-reflection and knowledge in a manner that is enriching, inclusive and appealing to the widest audiences. With the twentieth century's march of secular modernity across the globe, the legacy of colonialism that has left so many doubting who they are in their very selves, and the dominance of wars and conflict in people's lives, the rich tradition of wisdom and spirituality that the Muslim world has to offer

has often been forgotten. With its emphasis on 'story and dream' Khayaal Theatre has sought to create a space of safety (the real meaning of the word 'islam'), and to revive the spirit of wonder and creativity.

Luqman and Eleanor have worked tirelessly to fulfil these objectives with patience and good humour, and they are beginning to witness the fruits of their resilience, as Khayaal Theatre becomes more firmly established as a presence in British Muslim communities and wider society. Touching the hearts of all ages, races and classes, Khayaal Theatre has also sought to bring a greater sense of unity and brotherhood to all of those that come to watch the productions. At a time when all are feeling a heightened sense of anxiety and uncertainty, these productions and adaptations of stories and parables from a diverse range of Muslim cultures as well as those of other faith traditions, help to bring back a sense of confidence and hope. This is especially important for younger generations.

Theatre without Walls, a project supported by Amal and Aziz Foundation, aims to bring Khayaal Theatre to wider audiences and was running successfully at the beginning



of Resilience

of 2020. As Luqman says, '2020 began with much promise as we'd booked half of the 40-50 projected events for the year by the end of January. In fact, we were excited by the prospect of exceeding our output targets again.' The highlight for the beginning of the year was a performance of 'The Messenger' for Oxford University Islamic Society. It was in February, as the pandemic began to spread that Khayaal's clients started to cancel prearranged live performances and request that performances be delivered on-line. Khayaal Theatre had to adapt quickly and effectively in response to the shifting situation and the sudden uncertainty which everyone now faced. Luqman says that it is fortunate that at the time the company was in the process of finishing off two short promotional films that showcase the work of Theatre without Walls. These films have reached tens of thousands globally and served as a transition bridge between live physical touring and the creation and streaming of digital content.

From the beginning of May, Khayaal Theatre began to deliver performances on-line both nationally and internationally, with audiences from Washington DC, Dubai, Darussalam and Kuala Lumpur: 'These events included collections of tales of wisdom, wonder and humour from Muslim heritage on the occasions of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and Hajj from Jalaluddin Rumi, Mulla Nasruddin and Mansa Musa, to name but a few' (Luqman Ali).

Luqman and Eleanor also adapted new wisdom tales for digital audiences, specifically addressing the experience of lockdown, entitled 'Quarantine Tales'. These included adaptations of tales from Tunisia (Tale of the Sands), Iraq (The Doctor's Helper from Iraq) and West Africa (Life and Death at the Well). These tales, performed by Eleanor Martin, touch upon the theme of the human fear of a loss

of self, and show that, if only we can let go of that fear, then far from losing the self, we become a part of the great flow of life, as it unfolds according to its mysterious and inescapable laws. This adaptive move to digital content production means that half a million people around the world have been able to access and benefit from Khayaal's distinctive work.

As well as continuing to develop on-line theatre, Khayaal Theatre has managed to build partnerships with other producers including Oxford's Creation Theatre and English Touring Opera, that are also working to meet the cultural needs of diverse audiences with online offerings. Khayaal also plans to launch an online drama academy in the spring. Khayaal's digital content is available on Alchemiya, its YouTube channel and will soon be available by subscription on Patreon.

Among the positive responses to their work is this statement from Zaharah B: "This is what is needed to highlight the unconscious processes in the minds of Muslims. We live in a diverse world and yet we crave for peace within and without. Theatre will be able to highlight the mysteries of everyday life. This theatre reminds me of Shakespearian plays that have been popularised and cherished over centuries!"

By Dr Rebecca Masterton and Luqman Ali

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Twitter | Facebook | YouTube | Instagram

KESTRL - CHANGING BANKING FOR GOOD

How two Cambridge MBAs are attempting to transform the way in which Muslims interact and grow their wealth in the UK.

“Why don’t you use an Islamic Bank?”

It was a simple enough question asked by my good friend Daeng, after witnessing me pay for lunch with a Barclays debit card one day between lectures. And yet I found myself completely unable to give him a straight answer. I began mumbling something about how my parents had opened the account for me years ago and how unlike Malaysia where Daeng was from, there weren’t any decent options in the UK, when suddenly the awful truth dawned on me - I didn’t really know.

I am proud to call myself a practicing Muslim and observe my faith in all aspects of my life, from the food that I eat to praying 5 times a day. However, when it came to my Banking and Finances, I actually knew very little beyond the idea that “interest is bad”.

Some further digging and a Nationwide survey later (conducted as part of our Summer research project), and I found I was far from alone in experiencing this. Whilst the vast majority of Muslims desired financial products that met their religious needs, over 75%



used no Islamic solutions to speak of, citing a lack of awareness of what was out there and a dissatisfaction with the few they did know about stating they were too expensive and non-digitally friendly.

This was mind blowing to me. Whether it was opening a current account or taking out a mortgage, it was as if we’d normalised the idea across generations that it was alright to compromise on our religious values when it came to achieving financial goals. Tackling this problem is why Daeng and I decided to combine our skills in Fintech and Islamic Banking to found Kestrl.

WHAT IS KESTRL?

Kestrl is a mobile app that makes it easy for Muslims to achieve their financial goals without compromising their values.

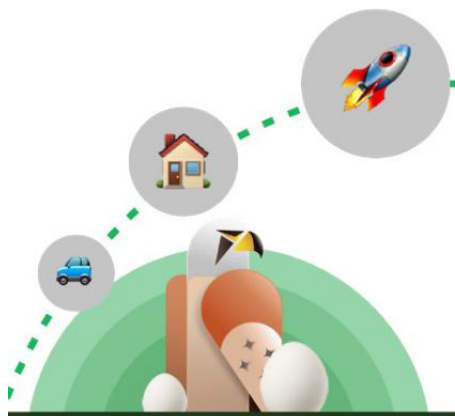
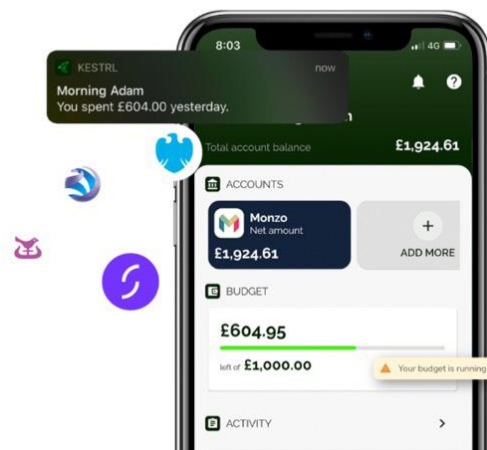
We do this by helping you to build a monthly budget, save up for short term goals and then invest and grow your wealth for the long term. At Kestrl we wanted to simplify not only the concepts of Islamic Finance, but the more basic principles of personal finance in general which many of us have little knowledge of when we enter the working world.



1. BUDGETING

At its core, budgeting is about making sure you have more money coming in than you have going out. However, beyond this it's about figuring out the most efficient way to spend your income so you can save up as much of it as possible for your goals, whether it's saving up for a car, a wedding or a house.

At Kestrl we do this for you automatically, connecting your bank accounts to the Kestrl app via Open Banking, we can create a personalized budget for you based on your spending and figure out how to get the most out of your income.



2. SAVING

One of the biggest issues people face is setting realistic savings goals and sticking to them, whether it's saving for an upcoming holiday or putting down a deposit for a house.

Using Kestrl you can visualize your goals on an interactive timeline and track your progress towards them. You'll also be able to transfer money into Kestrl savings pots to make sure you're not tempted to stray from your goal.

3. INVESTING

Probably the most popular area of personal finance, but also the least understood with many people looking to invest to make a quick return. One of the most basic principles of investing is that (in most cases) real returns will only be seen over the long term (5 to 10 years or even longer), and so you should only invest for your longer-term goals.

At Kestrl we're creating a marketplace of all the products that match our users' religious obligations, from halal savings accounts and portfolios, to investment into property or gold. You'll be able to view, compare and purchase these products directly through the Kestrl app.



JOIN US!

We'd love to welcome you onboard our mission to transform the way in which we interact with our finances, reaching our goals without compromise.

Download Kestrl today on the App Store or Google Play and find out more at kestrl.co.uk Also feel free to get in touch with any questions at info@kestrl.co.uk, we'd love to hear from you!

Areeb Siddiqui
Founder and CEO, Kestrl





CURRENT AFFAIRS

The theme for this issue's Current Affairs section is 'Justice' and we were pleased to receive a range of submissions from ISoc members on the topic. To give a taste of the content in this issue's six-article section, we have a piece on the importance of women's contribution to the field of science and an article that discusses specifically the topical issue of social justice. As usual, views and opinions expressed should be seen to represent only those of their author.

Justice and Technology

Before the law stands a gatekeeper. A man from the country comes to this gatekeeper and requests admittance to the law. But the gatekeeper says that he cannot grant him admittance ... The man from the country had not expected such difficulties; after all, he thinks, the law should be accessible to everyone at all times.
– Franz Kafka

In *The Republic*, Plato tentatively stumbles upon an understanding of justice as ‘giving every man what is right’. The law outlines many rights for us; yet, there are gatekeepers that bar these rights for many. These gatekeepers are an arduous court process and expensive legal fees. In *Online Courts and the Future of Justice*, Richard Susskind outlines a vision that can break these gates down. The vision has two strands: online judging and extended courts.

Online Judging

In 1926, the esteemed American judge Learned Hand said ‘as a litigant I should dread a law suit beyond almost anything short of sickness and death’. Unfortunately, our courts have not become any friendlier since. They impose a burdensome process which is not at all conducive to helping regular people gain access to their rights. Physical courts may represent the so-called majesty of the law – yet they often lead to delays. Arguments failing to be presented before the day’s end lead to hearings lasting for weeks – all the time increasing legal fees or leaving self-represented litigants out of work. As the saying goes, ‘justice delayed is justice denied’; we must ask ourselves, does the majesty of grand halls contribute to justice at all?

Susskind recommends a solution to antiquated physical hearings – a move to *online judging*. Just as many physical meetings have been replaced by email chains, many judgments can be replaced with online decisions. Evidence and arguments would be uploaded to a portal and the judge could make requests which lawyers/litigants could respond to iteratively. People could work on the case at convenient times and the inefficiencies associated with physical congregation could be avoided. This has had success already. For example, in Holland, the *Rechtwijzer* is a family court which settles divorce cases through an online portal rather than physical hearings. This has made the divorce process much less stressful than it used to be. Although this speeds up decision making and contributes to justice procedurally, online judging only makes the court process less arduous. Susskind’s second suggestion

seeks to ameliorate the injustice of legal fees.

Extended Courts

In the 1980s, 80% of the population were eligible for legal aid; by 2008 this number had dropped to 23%. Since then, there have been even further cuts and thus, a rise in self-represented litigation. As any law student can attest, our laws are extremely complex. Some have compared navigating the treacherous terrain of English law to operating on yourself. *Extended courts* aim to make the medicine of the law accessible to all.

An extended court would extract relevant legal points from a litigant’s grievances. It would help users collect evidence appropriately; for example, by applying important legal principles such as the distinction between fact and law. The system would also help construct sound legal arguments. In the US, LawHelpInteractive is spearheading self-assembly documentation. By asking users a few simple questions, LawHelpInteractive constructs legal documents allowing people to bring claims without extensive legal fees. Susskind has been advocating for a court system that presents users with their legal options since 1986 – recent technologic developments (such as GPT-3) now make his visions increasingly feasible.

Challenges

Many arguments can be presented against these suggestions. But as Voltaire says ‘the perfect is the enemy of the good’. Thus, we must prioritise the purpose of our courts. I believe justice calls for people to have access to their legal rights in a timely fashion – notwithstanding whether they can afford legal fees. Of course, there must still be a recourse to traditional hearings. But as we seek to *give every man what is right*, for most cases, online judging and extended courts will help open the gates of law to everyone at all times.

Musaddik Ahmed

What Science Might Have Been with Women

Women have been historically underrepresented in science; less than 30% of science researchers worldwide are women, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics¹. Despite performing the same as or better than men in aptitude tests, women are less likely to get into higher positions such as professorships and when they do, they face a lack of recognition and funding for their work. This article imagines what might have been different had women not been historically excluded from the field and attempts to highlight the consequences for society.

Whether you include them within the definition of science or not, the natural philosophies of Aristotle and Plato have undoubtedly had an impact on subsequent scientific approaches around the world. Thus, their views on women as inferior were also inherited and seen as acceptable in the scientific sphere. Plato believed that men who lived bad lives would be reborn as women. Aristotle believed that women provided the unorganised material to produce an embryo, but the man provided the 'form' or 'soul' which guided its development into a human being. This inevitably set the scene for the treatment of women in medicine and, where they were even considered, reduced the value of women's bodies, leading to non-consensual and unethical research.

Cardiovascular disease (CVD), was thought for many years to predominantly affect men, until it was found that women simply exhibit a different profile of symptoms. Even now, women are significantly less likely to be diagnosed with CVD and are more likely to receive lifesaving procedures later during the course of a heart attack². Globally, CVD remains the leading cause of mortality in women³. Had doctors been trained to recognise differing symptoms in women, countless unnecessary deaths and misdiagnoses may have been avoided.

Omission of women as respected scientists and as subjects has led to whole fields of medicine being left almost entirely unexplored, until recently. One in three women in the UK will suffer from a reproductive or gynaecological health problem, yet less than 2.5% of publicly funded research is dedicated to these areas⁴. If women were involved and valued in higher positions within the scientific field, female health might be afforded greater priority. We could now have a stronger body of research in place to investigate female-specific conditions like menopause, preeclampsia, endometriosis and gynaecological cancers. Inclusion of women in medicine is an urgent matter, if you add racial inequalities, this is a potentially fatal intersection for women of colour: black

women are five times more likely to die during pregnancy and labour in the UK⁵.

Historically, exclusively male rodent models have been used in scientific research. Not having to account for female hormone cycles was thought to provide more standardised results, neglecting the fact that it is necessary to observe the effects of a treatment on women to whom the research will also be applied. The thalidomide tragedy of the 1950s is just one poignant example of the effects of this lack of testing on female physiology, and pregnancy specifically.

In 2018-19, women still only comprised less than 30% of professors. I think this is a dual problem of women not putting themselves forward for positions and of men not considering them. Either way, the disparity of male and female professors demonstrates that we are missing out on some of the best minds; how much research and scientific progress has been impeded because of the exclusion of women? Recognising the impact of exclusion will help us to imagine and create a diverse future for science and identify how we can improve upon it.

We have already seen encouraging changes in the position of women in science, with women outnumbering men in some undergraduate STEM subjects. But this doesn't always translate to transitioning to further study or careers in science. Maybe the question we should be asking today is, why aren't we seeing more women in top scientific research roles? Science's perception of women has changed, but perhaps women's perception of science hasn't; perhaps science needs to change. We need more women mentors, we need affirmative action for senior positions and continued support for female graduates to progress in STEM careers and to make laboratories more accessible and flexible for women with children. These changes will naturally bring with them a greater prioritisation of women's health and wellbeing as well as the advancement of science.

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Coral Benfield

Deen behind Bars

"Please contact the imam at your local prison (through the prison's switchboard number available online) to enquire about volunteering opportunities. The process involves interviews and security clearance which can take some time but is well worth doing."

The young prisoner paces around me erratically. His wiry hair hanging like curtains over his gaunt cheeks, and as he circles me, I notice multiple rips in his tired grey tracksuit. Speaking at 100 miles an hour he tells me that due to his mother's addiction during pregnancy, he was born opiate-dependent, he's been struggling for years to stop using, he says, it's killing him. Suddenly he stops, and I wonder warily what his next step might be. He looks down at the ground, his voice barely a whisper, "I fell off the Deen".

My own preconceptions have taken me hostage; I hadn't for a second imagined this man may be Muslim. His voice shakes, "In my last prison I found the Sirat ul Mustaqeem. I learnt Al-Baqarah with the Imam". I'm listening vainly for any mispronunciation in his Arabic, but it's flawless. This man has memorised more Quran than I have - it's hard to swallow down the shock of this realisation.

The prison environment is a strange one. A concrete bubble cut off from our civilisation and social doings. A mix of self-labelled 'career criminals', those caught up in the wrong crowds, and yet others born to parents who encouraged or forced criminal behaviour upon them. While searching for answers some have found faith inside the prison walls and transformed their lives. I'm reminded every day that it could be me instead of them had I been dealt a different hand in life.

"Salam-o-laikum miss!" someone yells at me in the courtyard. "Here we go," I think, the prison officers have already warned me about harassment. I turn around to find myself face to face with a man covered in tattoos and wisps of a blonde beard. "I'm sorry for yelling", he blurts out, "it's just that I converted inside and you're the first Muslim woman I've seen". I'm completely taken aback; the officers hadn't prepared me for this. I return his Salam, and he walks away but I'm left with a feeling of guilt in the pit of my stomach. How many men and women are locked up who we never think of, pray for,

or count as part of our Ummah? Whenever I pass him from then on, we say our Salams quietly, a moment of acknowledgement of the faith that connects us.

On Wednesdays, volunteers from the local Christian community come into the prison, and I ask the Imam in an almost accusatory tone why he hasn't arranged something similar. He sighs despondently, "I've asked the local community to attend our Jummah prayers here for years. All I want is for them to stand shoulder to shoulder with the men. Nobody is interested. They forget that while we cannot judge these men, at the end of the day we ourselves will be judged for ignoring them".

During Ramadan, the isolation in the prison is palpable. It hangs in the air as the men wake up to eat Suhoor alone in their cells, break their fasts alone in their cells, and pray Taraweeh alone in their cells. The lockdown conditions have made fasting even more challenging, without family visits or Islamic classes. It's a stark contrast to the warmth and festivities that persevere despite Covid in the outside world.

In December I'm going for Umrah and I feel torn. Some of these men will never perform Umrah or Hajj, never weep in front of the Ka'bah, never smell the sweetness of the Haram carpets. I momentarily step over the boundary I've carefully maintained - to not let anyone get a glimpse of my personal life. "I'm going for pilgrimage", I say, "is there anything you want me to pray for? I would want the opportunity if I were in your shoes". His answer is simple, "Just pray for my forgiveness".

A few days later as I'm stood in the Mataf for Asr, I feel beyond blessed to have this opportunity. I think of all the men and women higher than me in the sight of Allah SWT because of years spent locked behind their doors seeking Istighfar. I pray for their forgiveness and strength, and for the forgiveness of our Ummah for neglecting them.

Hibah Hassan

Can 'modern' and 'progressive' thinking deliver justice?

The call to modernity is fiercer than ever. An era of progress and forward thinking, where anything contradictory is deemed backward and narrow-minded. An age of human rights, equality, freedom and 'justice'. But have we progressed and fundamentally changed as human beings such that our current ideas and values are 'correct' and most suited to solving the problems we face today and in the future?

Human beings are the fundamental unit of society and the aim of society is to understand the reality of their problems, both individual and collective, and provide for them a solution. Human beings have had the same organic needs and instincts, irrespective of external changes, since the time of the first man, Adam (AS). Humans throughout all ages have been attracted to the opposite sex due to their procreational instinct, have always sought to worship, have had an intrinsic sanctification instinct, and of course, needed to eat and drink - among other instincts, needs and desires.

Undoubtedly, the world we live in is more connected than ever with the ability to send information across the globe in seconds. Many of us live in global cities unlike the villages of the past. Indeed, there has been technological and scientific development but has this changed the essence of human beings and what they need and require to survive? For instance, humans need to connect with other people for companionship but even with that, like before, it is a limited number of connections that can be maintained and the same number of meaningful relationships that can be kept. One can have a million followers on Facebook, but it is not possible to actually maintain all those relationships. If we whittle a human being down, what is left are their organic needs and instincts which have not really changed. Regardless of scientific development and technology the fundamental instincts of a human are the same. Therefore, the intellectual concepts that are used to solve a human's fundamental problems should not have to change to address the same needs and instincts.

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IF WE WHITTLE A HUMAN BEING DOWN, WHAT IS LEFT ARE THEIR ORGANIC NEEDS AND INSTINCTS WHICH HAVE NOT REALLY CHANGED.

The solution must come from the truth. What we perceive as the truth is what we can confirm with our senses as reality. This is the way we confirm simple mathematical sums. This cannot change as long as the laws of the universe and attributes that Allah, the almighty, has put in all things remain. The truth of the matter is that we as humans do not understand all the laws of the universe and attributes of things; humans are limited in their nature and they are incapable of understanding everything that is designed by the unlimited creator. Those who advocate for progression and modernist thinking market their thinking as getting closer to the truth but their error is derived from neglecting the truth revealed to us from the unlimited creator. Humans have presumptions and ideas on what they think makes a just society and how to organise the affairs of mankind, based on their restricted reality. However, we see the society always change its ideas and laws as it realises mistakes and contradictions in its judgement, due to the inherent inability of man to understand the consequences and

results of all decisions. This is an inability to understand what is best for mankind, and for the environment.

Humans indeed have not changed, and so it is a blessing that Allah sent the Prophet (PBUH), as a last messenger, to teach us what to do, how to live and what is right and wrong. There was great injustice at the time of the Prophet (PBUH) in Arabia from cheating in the market to mistreatment of women

and oppression of orphans. We would not have to go far to see that our society faces many similar problems today. The solutions that Allah swt, the almighty, has given us from Islam are the solution to the injustices we see around the world; the same way they were the solution to injustices of the past, as they are from the one who has created the past, present and future.

Danial Farooq

Accountability for the Self and Mindfulness in Islam

The new year, along with many opportunities, brings new challenges and experiences. It may therefore be important for us to find pockets of time for a little mindfulness and to perhaps equip ourselves with some tools that will allow us to hold ourselves accountable if we react to uncertainties and change in ways we think are negative.

We have already seen an almost paradigm shift in individual habits. A study examining people's behaviour at the start of lockdown in Italy found that 34.4%, out of a pool of around 3500, felt that they had an increase in appetite whilst 17.4% expressed a decrease in appetite. And almost 15% of people turned to buying more locally produced, organic fruits and vegetables¹. In the UK, a significant amount, almost 1 million people, were considered to have stopped smoking in 2020².

Other than health, we know that shopping habits and screen time have also changed. Netflix and online streaming platforms have seen 16 million new customers join their sites³. And a company like Amazon for example, has seen profits triple that of last year's figures.

Luckily in Islam, the Qur'an, the hadith and several pieces of work from classical Islamic scholars⁴ elucidate many helpful ways in which one can self-evaluate and try to stop a bad habit in its track.

Starting with an understanding of the self

In Islam, it is considered that we are not blameworthy for fleeting thoughts. We recognise that we have a '*nafs*' that inclines towards pleasing the ego, being excessive, being materialistic (etc), and that there is also the presence of the Shaytan, another external source of negative thoughts. However, alongside this there is the concept of humans possessing '*aqil*', the intellect, the ability to reflect, gain and possess knowledge; and the '*fitrah*' which is a nature that compels towards good actions. We therefore possess a responsibility to make sure that the heart '*qalb*', amongst these constituents of the soul, is inclined more towards that which is good. The root of the word '*qalb*' actually is 'to turn' and at times we may find our heart turned more towards the '*nafs*' rather than the intellect.

It is important, therefore, that we acknowledge a bad thought rather than ignore it, and that we identify the root feelings behind it. We can then reason with it, remind ourselves of the consequences of that action, remind ourselves of God, consider imposing a personal penalty of more good actions if the bad action is still pursued and remind ourselves of the reward for patience and forbearance. Taking steps to hold oneself accountable, when no one else will, embodies the idea that we acknowledge God is with us wherever we are and that we are making an effort to be mindful of Him.

As for an action that has yet to actualise, the great Egyptian scholar, Al Suyuti (1505 CE) created a great framework that could be used to ***categorise steps leading up to the realisation of the action*** that we can use to recognise when we have an impulse.

Al Suyuti '*describes the first stage of a thought as al-hajis, a sudden and fleeting thought that comes and goes before one can consider it. We may not even notice it was there at all. The second stage is al-khatir, a thought that we give attention and consideration. At this stage we have a choice to continue down this train of thought or to ignore it. The third stage is badith al-nafs, our inner dialogue or "talking of the self" as we pursue the thought and seriously consider acting upon it. The final stages are al-ham and al-'azm, the decision and determination to put the thought into action'. As for a good thought we can pursue and act upon.*'⁵

Also integral to self-accountability is the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness can be defined as '*the quality or state of being conscious or aware of something.*' Out of many mindfulness practices within Islam (e.g. *Taffakur, Dhikr, and Taddabur*), there is the act of *Tawassum*. *Tawassum is to take inspiration and lessons from nature and the universe overall. If one takes a walk through the park, or local river canal and draws lessons from water or from the living plants, they will be practicing this aspect of mindfulness. In the Qur'an verse 15:75 refers to this type of contemplation (the word in blue):*

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْمُتَوَسِّمِينَ

'Surely in this are signs for those who contemplate.' 15:75.

In all, practicing reflection and mindfulness may help us act less impulsively, and allow us to understand our feelings and reactions to others in times of uncertainty and difficulty. We may be able to act more justly to others, if we self-examine and recognise traits in ourselves that we can improve.

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Root yourself, so you may help others

People come to university to be educated, and it doesn't take long to find out that this education extends far beyond the syllabus. One topic on which everyone seems keen to make sure we are *educated* is social justice. It's important, emotive, evocative stuff. And so, it's germane to think deeply about how to approach it. In every generation, many well-intentioned people do harm while believing they are serving progress. How do we make sure we are of those who are rightly guided? How do we make wise decisions?

One advantage we have as Muslim students is access to the Islamic tradition: a centuries-old discursive tradition of scholars, books, law, theology, science and philosophy. Many of us in this community are bicultural, some are bilingual. But our advantage lies in something else; all of us are (for lack of a better word) *bi-weltanschauung*. Raised and educated where we were, we've absorbed the worldview of this society (call it whatever you like; modernity, late-capitalism, post-modernism). But we've also chosen to be connected to something else, another tradition forged in a very different place and guided by different values. A living tradition we can connect to by sitting with our scholars today.

The Islamic tradition is remarkable. It's divine and beautiful and wise - and so it's startlingly alien in our broken world (even to us). It's a mirror, putting us in the position to spot things in our own and society's blindspots. It provides us with new language and frameworks to improve ourselves, and improve society, to uncover hidden oppression and new solutions. If there's one useful lesson I've realised it's this: use the tradition to interrogate the modern world, not the other way around.

So much of what we take for granted about our world right now may look set in stone but is actually new and strange and fickle. We're all subject to ideological and sociological fads; fads which didn't

exist a couple of centuries ago and will have blown away in another century. Being rooted in the Islamic tradition, with its timeless principles (quite literally timeless, for the Quran existed before creation), we have a platform to stand on to navigate this. If you wish, you can take the latest idea about progress, scrutinise our scholars and books, declare all sorts of things backwards and throw them out. You'd be left with a hollow religion that challenges nothing important in our worldview, a husk that will be washed away just as soon as the next wave of fashionable ideas come in. But if you take the tradition seriously, delve into it and try to inhabit its world, you'll undergo an education like no other.

If you want to pursue social justice, ground yourself in the Islamic worldview. A shallow declaration of allegiance (*'Muslim is one of my many identities'*) is insufficient, you must be intellectually serious and spiritually open with the tradition. Here's one practice I've found helpful; if you ever find yourself

brushing off something deep-rooted in scholarly consensus as 'out-dated' - stop. Instead, search for the wisdom. You'll learn so much more.

Our scholars cared deeply about justice in a way that's almost impossible for us to comprehend, not just as an abstract ideal, but as a lived experience.

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OUR SCHOLARS CARED DEEPLY ABOUT JUSTICE IN A WAY THAT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO COMPREHEND, NOT JUST AS AN ABSTRACT IDEAL, BUT AS A LIVED EXPERIENCE.

If you feel something is off, the reason is probably this: there's something significant you're missing. There's a key spiritual, psychological or moral insight you're blind to. Return to the tradition until you understand why it took this position. If you don't get it, then keep trying and learning until you grasp its worldview. That's what rooting yourself in the tradition means.

Here are some benefits you'll get from doing so:

1) Grounding yourself, so you make wise decisions

In our tradition, you don't make wise decisions

just by accumulating information. You do so by undergoing internal transformation, perfecting your character and internalising the message of God. This can't be pursued as a side-project to campaigning for social justice. It's intrinsic to it.

I'm reminded of the great Tunisian scholar Ibn Ashur. He lived in a time of great nationalism, when the educated elite around the world strongly believed that nationalism was a virtue (half of Europe was fascist at this time). He famously resisted, even when expelled from his job. We may now look back at the madness of 20th century nationalism and be proud when our scholars insisted on not twisting the message of Islam to fit petty, racist ideologies. But while Ibn Ashur knew when to resist the political fad of the day, he himself was a moderniser of the best type; radically expanding and modernising education in Tunisia, including introducing a modern scientific curriculum. Fundamentally, he was a scholar steeped in and transformed by our tradition, and so able to distinguish truth from falsehood. And so his legacy will stand the test of time.

2) Peer into society's blindspots

"PROGRESS MEANS MOVEMENT IN A DESIRED direction... Are people becoming, or likely to become, better or happier? Obviously, this allows only the most conjectural answer. Most individual experience (and there is no other kind) never gets into the news, let alone the history books; one has an imperfect grasp even of one's own. We are reduced to generalities. Even among these it is hard to strike a balance.... Perhaps we grow kinder to children; but then we grow less kind to the old. Any G.P. will tell you that even prosperous people [now] refuse to look after their parents.

[One change] is the advance, and increasing application, of science. As a means to the ends, I care for, this is neutral. We shall grow able to cure, and to produce, more diseases --bacterial war, not bombs, might ring down the curtain-- to alleviate, and to inflict, more pains, to husband, or to waste, the resources of the planet more extensively. We can become either more beneficent or more mischievous. My guess is we shall do both; mending one thing and marring another, removing old miseries and producing new ones, safeguarding ourselves here and endangering ourselves there." – CS Lewis, 1958.

We're saturated with the idea that our society is progressive, in constant improvement. It's fairer to say it's in constant change, always developing ways to hide old and new injustices. The moral injunctions of our religion, however, come from a

timeless source and will help us see with clear eyes upon where oppression lies.

There are many examples, but here's one: slavery. One of the biggest myths the West tells itself is that it abolished slavery. It certainly got rid of the name, but it kept the exploitation and oppression in myriad ways, not least by creating a parasitic global financial system and inventing the practice of mass prisons. Subjugation exists as it always did, but now it's justified in new ways. Through the prism of the Islamic tradition, these new justifications are meaningless. Interest is haram for good reason; mass prisons are alien to our philosophy of justice. A well-rooted Muslim would be clear-eyed about injustice, no matter the justification of the age.

3) Find inspiration and provide new solutions

There's a book by an academic called Timur Kuran which argues that Islamic law historically prevented the rise of modern corporations in the Muslim world, by redistributing wealth and locking away capital for charitable purposes (in *Waqfs*) rather than in profit-maximising entities. While he complains about how backwards this all is (and indeed, most of these have now been abolished for the sake of economic progress), I find it inspiring.

Building an economy based on a moral vision of society, rather than an economy based on corporate profit, is the most pressing issue of our time. By now, the damage inflicted upon society and the planet by self-serving corporations is well known. Their political influence is malign, the human cost of their profits is beyond belief, their environmental impact is devastating. They invest billions in reshaping our psyche, fanning every insecurity to maximise their profits. There are few places to draw hope from, but our tradition is one. In it, we can see a very different world existed in the past and is possible now.

I remember talking to an academic at Oxford, a European non-Muslim who specialised in Islamic finance. I asked her why she had dedicated her career to studying Islamic finance. She told me that if you look around the world, the only serious attempt *anywhere* to create a systematic ethical alternative to global finance is Islamic finance. She said that of course, it has limitations (it is still new), but it's already developing in unique ways. She saw great hope in it. Here is an example where, by taking the injunctions of our tradition seriously, we may provide solutions for both ourselves and the world.

Ezziddin Yonis

A LOOK INTO ISOC FOOTBALL

Mohamady el-Gaby has been Captain of the OUISoc Brothers' Football team since it first registered with the English Football Association (FA) and entered the University league in 2018, though he informs us that the legendary bros' football Friday sessions are probably as old as the Society itself. We hear the words bros' football banded around all the time, yet it's fair to say that a number of us are confused as to what exactly they refer to. Abdul Lateef, Content Curator, probed Mohamady with a few questions to get to the bottom of this conundrum.

We discovered, foremost, that bros' football consists of weekly casual kickabouts (open to all) on Friday evenings. Beyond this the OUISoc FC 11-aside team trains once a week (usually Tuesday evenings) and plays in the university league and cup competitions on weekends. They also play friendlies against other societies and ISocs around the country, notably the annual ISoc varsity against Cambridge.

Mohamady tells us that on average there are around 16 players present at Friday sessions during term time,

though this number varies, and we were surprised on learning that the number of players actually reached an excess of 40 on one occasion.

As an undergraduate at Oxford, Mohamady studied Biochemistry from 2007-2011. After his postgraduate studies he came back to Oxford in 2016 to take up a postdoctoral associateship in Neuroscience. He is now a tutor at St Anne's college and delivers lectures in Neuroscience to undergraduates studying medicine and Biomedical sciences at the university.

How did you become involved in bros' football?

When I joined the ISoc as a fresher in 2007, Friday football was the go-to weekly fixture. A great way to socialise with brothers and enjoy a game of football. Post-football chills were a must (one of the many pre-COVID era luxuries). Fast-forward to 2016 when I came back to Oxford as a Postdoctoral Neuroscientist it was not hard to get back into the weekly football routine. The ISoc prides itself on having a seamless community of undergraduates and graduates. I ended up playing more football in my graduate years than I



did during my undergraduate days.

What does the club offer to its members?

Football! There's not much else we offer. Beyond the fitness benefits it's a great way to socialise with brothers.

How has bros' football changed over the years?

The most notable change has been the introduction of the OUISoc FC as an FA registered team that plays in university competitions. This has allowed the really football crazy brothers to play in a more competitive environment, where there are points, promotions and cups to be won.

The move towards 11-aside football was also a big change. Former ISoc President and previous Team Captain, Haseem Shah, was instrumental in setting up the first 11-aside friendlies, including the ongoing annual ISoc football varsity fixtures.

What was the importance of making football a part of your routine whilst at Oxford?

On a personal level, football is a must. It's great fun and offers good motivation to stay (relatively) fit.

Any highlights from your ISoc football career?

We have been very successful alhamdulillah, with our 11-aside team being promoted in each of the two seasons we played (2018/2019 and 2019/2020). We have also won various friendly competitions including the FOSIS midlands tournament in 2016 and the Interpal Gaza cup in 2017.

Best win?

The two varsity wins against Cambridge were pretty special. Best wins in terms of score-line were

last season's wins against the Polish and Indian societies (19-0 and 14-0 respectively!). My personal favourite was a 5-4 league win against Somerville college in our first season (2018-2019); we needed a win to get promoted and were 4-3 down with 10 minutes to go. We fought hard and scored two stunning goals (one coming in the very last play of the game) to secure promotion. The collective sense of brotherhood and accomplishment is irreplaceable.

Any notable injuries?

11-aside games can be very physical and we've had a few serious injuries, with the brothers involved paying a visit to A and E! Alhamdulillah these have been infrequent and even less frequent for the Friday kickabouts, which are more casual.

Do you have advice for anyone who wants to get involved in sport but is unsure on how to go about this?

Don't overthink it! Come down and join us on Fridays. It's great fun and you'll meet some great brothers. You'll find a mixture of abilities, ranging from university first teamers to brothers who have barely played before. All are welcome. And if you're serious about improving your fitness and playing more competitively, join us on Tuesday training sessions.

Looking back, what have you personally gained from your involvement in bros' football?

The greatest benefit, in my opinion, is the sense of brotherhood. I've made many lasting friendships on the pitch. Also, playing for the OUISoc team week after week, getting to be part of this cohesive team and working collectively to win games is a great experience. It's also an excellent way to delay the inevitable transition to sedentary Arab uncle status.



STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

We hope that this new 'Student Research Projects' section of the Magazine will be of particular interest to those who would otherwise not have much of a clue about what exactly their Oxford peers get up to.

MHARAB CHOUDHURY

FOURTH-YEAR MEDICINE, GREEN TEMPLETON COLLEGE

I undertook a research project as part of my FHS Medical Sciences course. I decided that I wanted to get some lab experience rather than reviewing academic papers and journals and was chosen to work with the Zaccolo Group in DPAG to research the cellular mechanisms that underpin labour and the onset of preterm labour. More specifically, I used FRET (Förster Resonance Energy Transfer) to investigate the effects of different phosphodiesterase inhibitors on the concentration of cAMP in myometrial cells.

Preterm labour is the 2nd most common cause of neonatal mortality, resulting in 28% of neonatal deaths and it poses the biggest challenge in obstetrics today. This is highlighted by the 15 million babies born per year that are preterm (10% of all babies), 1 million of which have complications. In developing countries, such as Malawi, 18.1% of live births are preterm, and in the US which has the 7th most annual PTBs, the financial cost was \$26.2 billion in 2005. Women in preterm labour are given tocolytics that delay labour. However, current options result in many side effects. Cyclic adenosine monophosphate (cAMP) is known to relax myometrial (uterine) smooth muscle, so investigation in ways to

upregulate cAMP levels could provide a better form of tocolytic therapy.

My methods relied on using human primary myometrial cells isolated from women undergoing elective caesarean section procedures. Once these cells had been acquired, they were cut up, suspended, cultured and plated onto wells. The cells were then adenovirally infected with FRET biosensors. Then, specific PDE inhibitors were pipetted onto each well and the response (cAMP levels) were measured. I based my approach on my PhD supervisor's own methods in the same area, who had investigated different inhibitors. I could adapt these methods to help with my own data and results. Reading papers on this topic of research also helped with interpreting the results.

I learnt a lot from conducting research, I gained so much respect and admiration for those who commit to it full/part-time. It helped me gain invaluable lab skills and writing skills that I will hopefully be able to make use of in the future. I also realised it's a big commitment; I want to wait until I am able to research something I am passionate about then contribute to the field of medicine in a meaningful way.

The purpose of my research is to investigate the cross-platform behaviours of online hate. The use of various online platforms for communication has been rapidly adopted into the home and workplace alike. However, these platforms have also provided an effective medium for spreading hateful content. Online hate thrives globally through self-organized, scalable clusters that interconnect to form resilient networks across multiple platforms, countries and languages.

Previous research in this field has generally focussed around one particular platform, even though there is sufficient evidence showing that hate groups often strategize the usage of different platforms in order to circumvent monitoring efforts.

My research aims to bridge this gap by investigating how hate groups make use of multiple online platforms to propagate hateful content.

Spreading hateful content online has emerged as a tool for politically motivated bigotry, xenophobia, homophobia, religious discrimination, and excessive nationalism [1, 2, 3].

Online hate has thus been linked to several abhorrent real-world events including incitement of mass shootings and bombings, and the mass recruitment of extremists – this normalisation of hate and how it can lead to violent crimes is depicted in the ‘pyramid of hate’ in Figure 1. It has only recently been recognised within academic literature that online hate is not simply an issue for a select few platforms; rather, networks of hate are often linked across these platforms, forming a global ‘network-of-networks’ dynamic [4]. Additionally, content moderation carried out independently on single platforms has led to less policed platforms becoming isolated, allowing hate to flourish. A cross-platform analysis would therefore help inform how regulation can become more coordinated across multiple platforms.

Though there is sufficient evidence proving such strategic usage of multiple platforms by hate groups, minimal

research has been carried out to explore this further. My research utilises a cross-platform approach for analysis in order to aid in a clearer understanding as to the dynamics of the global hate ecosystem. In particular, I make use of data retrieved from several platforms and both computational and social science approaches to model the wider structural dynamics of organised hate. Some of the methods I use include natural language processing, machine learning, social network analysis and interviews with practitioners in this field. The findings will then be used to develop a set of tools for law-enforcement or other academic researchers so as to provide a more accurate image of global organised hate and more effective solutions for its associated impacts.

My research will next involve an analysis of the effects of contemporary events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 US elections, and the Black Lives Matter resurgence, on the behaviours of hate groups. This will be done by collecting publicly available content from multiple social media platforms, including Twitter, Reddit, Gab and 4chan, and analysing them using various computational methods in order to understand how offline events can influence the online activity of hate groups. Moreover, I will model the wider online hate networks and content diffusion dynamics between the various platforms used by hate groups, so as to gain a more comprehensive representation of the global hate ecosystem.

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Figure 1

“Pyramid of Hate” as proposed in [5] depicting how the normalisation of biased, hateful behaviours can lead to violent hateful crimes.

Mammalian development starts from a single cell, which gives rise ~200 different cell-types, each performing specialized functions in the body. It was once considered that this limited functional capacity results from restriction of genetic information inherited by cells as they differentiate. However, ground-breaking experiments by John Gurdon where he transplanted the nucleus (and hence the genome) of a differentiated cell in an enucleated zygote, and showed the formation of a normal frog, proved that the genetic content of the differentiated cells contain all the information required to form a complete organism (Gurdon, 1962). This experiment suggested that despite having a complete plethora of genes, each cell-type only chooses to read limited/relevant information. Fascinatingly this “choice” that cells make in terms of the genes they express, is stable and inherited from a mother to a daughter cell i.e. a skin cell divides to make another skin cell and so on, a phenomenon termed as “cell memory”.

How do cells ensure the expression of cell-type specific genes only while silencing others? Gene silencing may result from physical sealing of the coding DNA, rendering it inaccessible for the gene activating transcription machinery. DNA in cells is wound around proteins to form chromatin. This packaging must be loosened for transcription machinery to express genes and vice versa. Hence chromatin packaging can determine the repertoire of genes expressed in the cell, forming a layer of information deciding cell fate despite the same genetic content; thus, termed epigenetic (meaning beyond genetics) modifications. Since individual genes must be silenced in cell-type specific manner, the pathways leading to tight chromatin packaging present a very complicated problem. X chromosome inactivation (XCI) presents a simple model for studying these epigenetics processes, as the complete X chromosome must be silenced in female mammals who inherit two copies of the chromosome as opposed to their male counterparts, in order to counter the imbalance in X-linked genes. I am studying an XCI-coupled epigenetic modification, called DNA methylation. To study how this process occurs, I am using the noble prize-winning genetic tool, CRISPR/Cas9, to introduce engineered fragments of the enzyme responsible in cells to know what part of enzyme is important for its recruitment.

Apart from gaining a better understanding of mammalian development, studying the epigenetic changes during differentiation has wide medical applications. For instance, malignant cancers depict a phenomenon called ectodermal to mesenchymal transition, where the cells change their lineage to mimic blood cells, allowing them

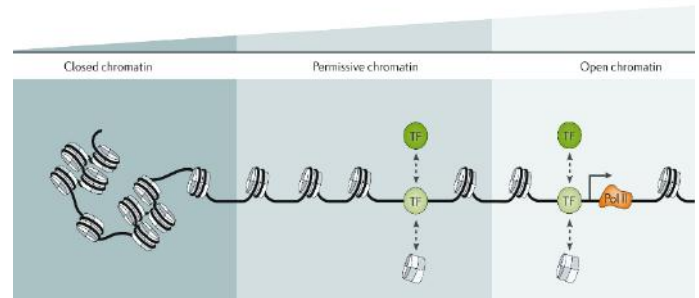


Figure 1: DNA is wound around proteins to form chromatin which must be in a loose conformation to allow access to the gene reading transcription machinery to the DNA. Transcription machinery includes proteins called transcription factors (TFs) which sit at the start of the gene and recruit polymerase (Pol II) which then “reads” the gene. Adapted from (Klemm, Shipony, & Greenleaf, 2019)

to enter bloodstream and seed secondary tumours. This is a case of cells “losing their memory”, shifting their gene expression program from one lineage to another, and thus in a way reversing the developmentally acquired differentiation status.

Epigenetic processes constitute a complicated network of proteins, displaying redundancy, the understanding of which is still oblique. Although we are far from understanding the underlying mechanisms governing embryogenesis and how the cell decide which gene to silence and when, it is fascinating how the process represents a robust system, resulting in a perfectly functioning adult body in a vast majority of cases.

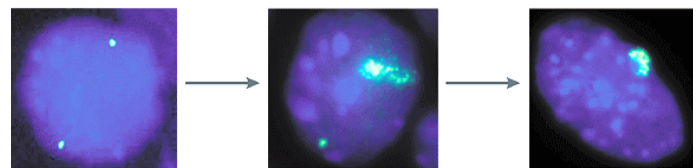


Figure 2: X chromosome inactivation leads appearance of the “Barr body” in nucleus; tightly packaged X chromosome which can be observed microscopically (arrow). Adapted from Wing, J. & O’Connor, C. (2008)

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IFFAT RASHID

DPHIL HISTORY, EXETER COLLEGE

I am from Kashmir and have always found myself connected to my homeland in many ways. The research I am currently undertaking at Oxford University reflects this attachment; my DPhil thesis explores some aspects of historical significance related to Kashmir. Since Kashmir was a princely state during the British colonial era, I aim to explore the key issue of how Kashmir as a space on the margins of the colonial empire, negotiated with imperial interstices and carved out an alternate political space for groups and movements whose discourses could not be simply subsumed within the official Indian or Muslim nationalist discourses. From the primary archival data, it appears Kashmir was not exceptional as along with its neighbours Punjab and Frontier it became part of a political arena during late colonial India in which the two primary political parties of British India, Indian National Congress and Muslim League, did not enjoy any dominance or direct influence. In my thesis, I note how this makes for a distinctive and understudied arena of political thought and action, whose Islamic character as a phenomenon spills across the borders of all three places. From among these groups and movements, my thesis focusses on the Ahrars, Ahmadis, Khaksars and how they define political action and debate between and within these areas, of which Kashmir becomes ideologically central. I also explore the role of other important international voices, especially poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal.

It was against the backdrop of the Khilafat movement of the 1920s, that Punjabi Muslims began to vehemently draw upon the tropes of Kashmir as a sacred space. Some kind of an emotive relationship emerged between Kashmir and Punjab.

Its inheritance can also be seen in today's Punjab and Kashmir. Since Kashmir remains at the centre of counter-nationalisms in South Asia, I believe that tracing the genealogy of this politics is crucial to understanding the dialogic relationship between Islam, nation-making and nationalism in the South Asian context even in the contemporary period.

I think my research could be categorised as an intellectual history project. As a student of history, I mostly work with archival material to construct the narratives. Visiting various libraries and archival repositories across the UK and South Asia remains crucial to my research. I mostly draw on newspapers in South Asian languages, especially Urdu, poetic compositions by important figures like Muhammad Iqbal, Zafar Ali Khan, Hafeez Jalandhari, autobiographies of important political figures, and colonial archives.

The groups at the centre of my work drew heavily upon Islamic imagery and displayed a complex interplay of religion and politics with their activities in Kashmir, linking this to the Punjab and North West Frontier as part of an immense political arena. By exploring the discourses of these groups, at this stage of the research, I can say 'religion' and 'politics' cannot always be neatly differentiated in various political movements.

With the condition of lockdown now in Oxford and a continued ban on high speed internet in Kashmir, for now and in the coming weeks or so, I will be examining how Kashmir was drawn into 'Islamic internationalist politics' in the inter-war period. Curiously, this is not part of the Khilafat movement which is how we normally trace the emergence of Muslim politics and its internationalisation.

COMMUNITY WORKS

TOMORROW

Sing not forlorn songs, nor cast wistful eyes
For those blessings that pass us by
For the longest nights and days with no light
Are truly blessed. See you not, O Blind?

Ache not, nor grieve, O silent heart
Duty binds us all to part
From that that's dear; each has its time.
In this truth, there's truth to find -
The travelers' shade is but for a while.

If cast off and lost, seek not to find
what once was, or what's to come is left -
What is falls upon the side.
Does the word a song find, to rhyme?

Still your anger, see you clear.
The stones mourn not the sweep of years
Nor rainclouds cry for those who give no ear,
Nor seeing eye, nor heart, nor care.

Sing not forlorn songs, nor shed your tears
Tomorrow's yet to come, and today's still here.

(Anonymous Brother)



Tayiba Sulaiman, St. Hilda's College



Fishing - Khadijah Hafeji, New College



The Last Braincell - Tayiba Sulaiman, St. Hilda's College

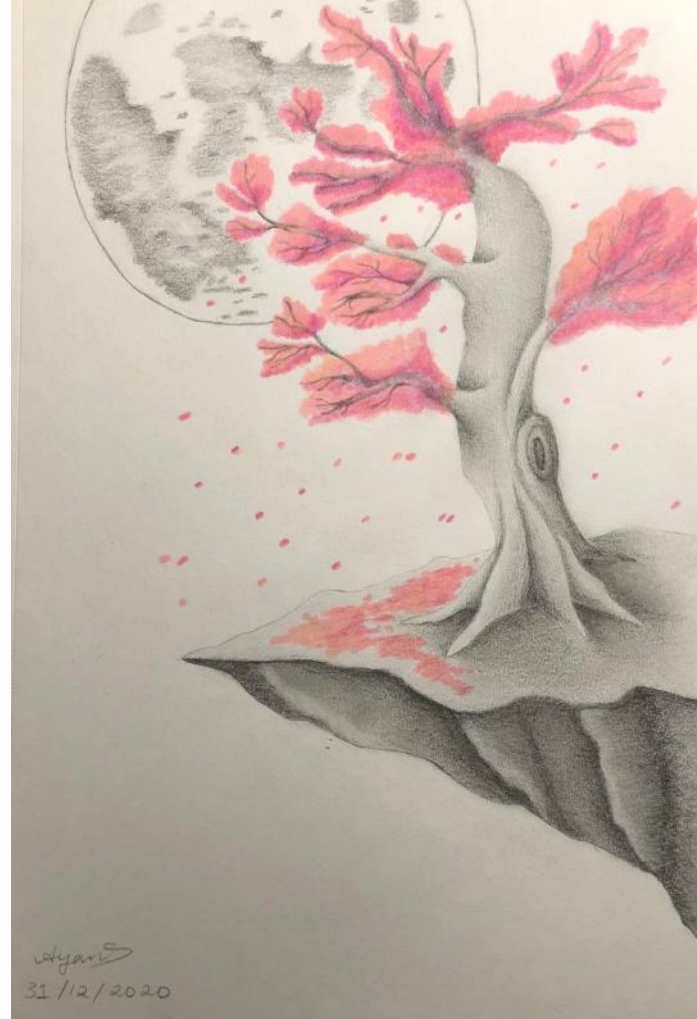
UNDER THE WINGS OF ANGELS

They call and call again
In those stillest moments
Where live those who remember often death
Who see not the shade under the wings of angels
Nor hear the scratching of their pens
But know their answer has been given,
The ink has dried,
And they will be given, and forgiven again.

(Anonymous Brother)

A rooted grounding,
A flowing dance,
The sun shines ever brightly,
And spring bursts forth.

(Anonymous Sister)



Ayan Shahid, Hertford College



Muaz Nawaz, St. Hugh's College

ONE

Who am I? I ask, sat
Lotus-legged,
Supplicant.
Palm a rosary, mala, tasbih,
Reflect, lest you miss the mark
Of what we seek. The
Oneness that collects us
Into one palm
Hewn below, above sewn - flash
Before we fall once again into
Individuality, reality,
Mendacity in duality
Breathe.
Genuflect, lest I light the illusory spark
Of belief in my delusory dual, lest we lose track of
What we seek. All of us, all of me,
Yet aikyam, echad, atman tell us not
Who are we? Listen.
Heed in tawhid, lest you - we - in samadhi,
Forget who we - you - shall be
One. For which 99 names, nor palbeu, tetragrammaton,
why, how, where, here
Shall not suffice.
For every individual
Has a dual and
Each infinity
No reality
Because there is has been will be only
He. The One with whom we
All shall be.

Rohan Kaya



Ameerah Latif, St. Hilda's College



Abdul Lateef, St. John's College



Waterfall - Khadijah Hafeji, New College

STARFISH ON THE BEACH

Two by two do the animals come,
Baking alive in the animal sun.
All washed ashore by an ocean at war,
The stars dry out in the sand on the floor.

One by one, with a vigorous swing,
I cast stars back to the wet, wild thing.
I know they will die if I leave them to dry
On the mile-wide beach in the crux of July.

But each star slung to the stubborn blue sea,
It lurches and belches another two free.
I can't save most of the stars on the coast.
Is it worth one's rescue if all the rest roast?

Still I stand in my battlefield lost,
Hearing the plunk of each asteroid tossed.
I'll never get through all the stars that accrue,
Though thankful indeed are the ones that I do.

Siddiq Islam

(adapted from Loren Eiseley's The Star Thrower)



Winter Sun - Basim Khajwal, New College



Aisha Sadiq, Brasenose College



Aisha Sadiq, Brasenose College

OUISOC COMMITTEE

Everyone on committee is always willing to talk to you and help with any questions or concerns you may have. For more details, please visit www.ouisoc.org/committee



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OUISOC Termcard - Hilary Term 2021

All events are hosted on **Zoom** with links posted on the WhatsApp groups

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Week 1 17 th Jan			Q-Club 7-9pm	Black Believers: Prophets 7-8:30pm	God's Messenger: Arrival 7-8pm	Sisters' Team Challenge 7pm Bro's Online Social 8pm	Tackling Food Poverty in Oxford 6:30-7:30pm
Week 2 24 th Jan		Managing Academic Work and Stress 7-8pm	Magazine Launch	Sacred Law: Worship, Ethics and Spirituality 7-9pm	Sisters' Craftersnoon 7pm Bro's Codenames Social 8pm	The Uyghur Tragedy 7-8pm	Grads Games Night 5pm
Week 3 31 st Jan	Election Information Evening 7-8:30pm		Marriage and Family Life Sisters: 6-7:30pm Brothers: 7:30-9pm	Black Believers: Companions 7-8:30pm	Sisters' Bake-Off 7pm Bro's Skribbl.io Championship 8pm	God's Messenger: The First Battle 7-8pm	
Week 4 7 th Feb	Elections Q&A 7-8:30pm	The Rights of the Earth: Islam and the Environment 7-8pm		Sacred Law: Worship, Ethics and Spirituality 7-9pm	Grads Movie Night 7pm	Halfway Celebration 8pm	In Search of the Sacred 6-7:30pm
Week 5 14 th Feb	Power through Prayer 5-6pm Elections Q&A 7-8:30pm	Introducing Islamic Art: Sound and Shape 6-7:30pm	Q-Club 7-9pm	Mischaracterising Muslims 7pm	Inside the Qur'an 7pm	God's Messenger: A Clear Victory 7-8pm	Who was Muhammed? 6pm
Week 6 21 st Feb		Election Night		Sacred Law: Worship, Ethics and Spirituality 7-9pm	Bro's Games Night 8pm		Grad Research Showcase 3-4pm
Week 7 28 th Feb	Applying for a DPhil 2-3pm	Academic Advice Session 7-8:30pm		Black Believers: Scholars 7-8:30pm	Sisters' Netflix Movie Night 7pm Bro's Online Social 8pm	God's Messenger: Final Days 7-8pm	
Week 8 7 th Mar	The Evolution Question 6-7:30pm			Sacred Law: Worship, Ethics and Spirituality 7-9pm	Bro's Among Us Social 8pm	Sisters' Games Night 7pm	Grads Quiz Night 5pm
Week 9 14 th Mar			Q-Club 7-9pm				

D.I. WEEK

REGULAR EVENTS	
Brothers' Reflection Circle	Every Friday, 11am
Sisters' Reflections	Every Sunday, 3pm
Welfare Chats	Weeks 2, 4, 6, 8
OMA Volunteering	Weeks 2-8

KEY			
Religious Education	Community	Graduates	Elections
Welfare & Social	Islamic Awareness	Politics	Other

رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا
إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

“Our Lord! Accept (this) from us.
Indeed! You are the Hearing, the Knowing.”



IKHLAAS

THE OUISOC MAGAZINE



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